

# The imaginary country: The Soviet Union in British public discourse, 1929-1943

---



---

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in History  
at the University of Canterbury

by  
Alison Stedman

## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>List of illustrations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Britain in the 1930s: the background</b>	<b>14</b>
The historiography	15
The public discourse	21
Britain in the 1930s: The context	24
Conclusion	32
<b>Chapter 2: Anti-Soviet responses to the Soviet Union, 1929-1943</b>	<b>34</b>
The economic challenge of the Soviet Union to the British Right	34
The early diplomatic challenge of the Soviet Union	40
Fascist expansion and anti-Soviet discourse	43
The year 1939	51
The wartime alliance	60
The left-wing anti-Soviets	71
The coping mechanisms	77
Conclusion	86

<b>Chapter 3: Pro-Soviet responses to the Soviet Union, 1929-1943</b>	<b>87</b>
Planning and collectivisation	<b>88</b>
After the first Five Year Plan	<b>97</b>
Soviet internal affairs	<b>99</b>
The Moscow show trials	<b>102</b>
The rise of Nazism	<b>115</b>
The events of 1939-1941	<b>122</b>
The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the wartime alliance	<b>136</b>
The coping mechanisms	<b>142</b>
Conclusion	<b>153</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>159</b>

## Abstract

For historians of twentieth-century British affairs, the decade of the 1930s is very significant. It was marked not only by a devastating economic crisis at the outset, but also by the rise of fascism in Europe and the onset of the Second World War at its close. These issues were problematic in themselves, but Britain's response to them was complicated still further by the deep divisions between the Left and the Right over socialism and over the Soviet Union. The presence of the USSR in the East and its influence in Britain loomed over the internal debates that took place, affecting British responses to difficult situations in drastic and far-reaching ways. People of both anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet persuasions were forced to account for events that did not tally with their most strongly held beliefs, hopes or fears.

This dissertation explores the ways in which British people of a variety of political leanings publicly processed and coped with the role of the Soviet Union in these debates. Using a range of sources including contemporary newspapers, books and pamphlets, I will trace the evolution of attitudes to the Soviet Union from 1929, the first year of the economic crisis, up until 1943, the high point of the Anglo-Soviet wartime alliance. My analysis will show how people with fundamentally different belief systems mirrored each other in their responses to intellectual challenges, and how interactions between different groups sustained or exaggerated each group's response to the Soviet Union. I will also critique the analyses of some historians who have limited the parameters of their studies to take in only single groups or single events, and in so doing have become unfairly critical of individuals who struggled to process a large number of difficult and confusing events.



## Acknowledgements

Thanks go first to my supervisors, Dr Chris Connolly and Dr Gareth Pritchard. They have been wonderful advisers. Everything they have ever said about my thesis work has been insightful and extremely practical, and they have always managed to communicate bad news in the kindest way possible! I have appreciated their help so very much. Thanks also to Judy Robertson, for her competent aid in all administrative areas, and to Dr Jane Buckingham, for her help as Director of Graduate Studies.

Many thanks to other postgraduates from the Humanities with whom I have shared office space or lunch breaks or earthquake evacuations – Helen Bones, Ben Kingsbury, Erin Harrington, Melinda Brown, Michael Harland, Halie McCaffrey, Bernadette Devonport, Gerard Morris, Gary Whitcher, Rosemary Baird and more – all of whom have provided interesting conversation and much moral support.

Thanks also to the staff of the UC libraries, for continuing to do their jobs in trying times. I am particularly grateful to the interloans librarians, without whom my research would have been impossible.

We have all had to deal with extraordinary circumstances in 2010 and 2011. Looking back to the September 2010 earthquake, I am astounded at how quickly and professionally the university dealt with the situation. We were cut off from our study spaces for a mere two weeks. Library services continued to be streamlined and efficient, despite the circumstances.

Obviously, the earthquake of February 22, 2011, was quite a different matter. The effect it had on all of us has been profound, and the disruption so much more severe. For a significant period of time following the quake, our priorities became entirely different. I would like to express particular thanks to the Civil Defence volunteers who rescued my computer equipment and key personal items from my office a week after the quake, restoring some peace to a worried thesis student's mind, and who helped me enter the same building a month later to retrieve everything I needed to finish my dissertation. I

am also thankful to the Postgraduate Office for pushing through extensions as quickly as possible so that I could continue to receive financial support.

On that note, I received financial aid from a number of areas. I am particularly grateful to the University for the Masters scholarship I was given in 2009, and to Freemasons New Zealand for the Postgraduate Scholarship they awarded me. As well as supporting me in everyday life, these awards helped me to fund a research trip to the UK for two months. This trip added a level of excitement and depth to my research, which would not have been the same if I had been forced to access everything by interloan in distant New Zealand.

My research trip to the UK in 2009 was made considerably easier by the welcome I received from Mark and Anita Geddes and Norman and Joy Maurice. Both families made a stranger from New Zealand feel completely at home, and as a result my time in London was so much more pleasant. I am also grateful to the staff of the British Library, at the St Pancras and Colindale sites; to the trustees and staff of the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex; and to the staff of the National Archives at Kew.

My flatmates, my friends, my churches and my God have all, in their own ways, helped me to come through the last two years relatively unscathed. I am very grateful to my friends Anna Gibbs and Christine Frampton, who each read through some of this dissertation and gave me helpful feedback.

I want to thank my family in particular:

My father has been a steady, practical support, despite his preference for the natural sciences and sensible career paths. He has always offered an interested ear, and he has been so generous to me throughout my university years in every way.

My mother did not live to see me start an MA, but she equipped me with everything I needed to see it through. Her example of perseverance, faith and a sense of humour under trial helped me as nothing else could to approach setbacks without flinching.

My siblings and their spouses have been so supportive, especially my sister Vivienne Anderson. As one who has gone before me in postgraduate study of the Arts, her moral support and encouragement to 'just keep swimming' helped immeasurably.

Two of my nieces, Ruby and Miriam Geddes, helped me every Tuesday by being completely uninterested in the Soviet Union and filling my head instead with princesses, dragons, fairies, mermaids, and Mary Poppins.

## List of abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
FSU	Friends of the Soviet Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (or the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification)
S.U.	Soviet Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## List of illustrations

1. Cartoon: 'The Castaways of Kensington', from the <i>Daily Worker</i> , 21 June 1933, p. 2.	<b>Front cover</b>
2. Cartoon: 'United Behind the Prime Minister', from the <i>Daily Worker</i> , 13 May 1939, p. 5.	<b>57</b>
3. Photo: 'A Russian girl sniper in London, 1942', from Curtis Keeble, <i>Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-89</i> (London, Macmillan, 1990), inset.	<b>64</b>
4. Cartoon: 'This Four-Power Pact', from the <i>Daily Worker</i> , 25 March 1933, p. 2.	<b>96</b>
5. Cartoon: 'Pontius Pilate, Prime Minister of Great Britain', from the <i>Daily Worker</i> , 24 August 1936, p. 5.	<b>116</b>
6. Cartoon: 'What's going to happen if he stops dancing?', from the <i>Daily Herald</i> , 19 September 1939, p. 4.	<b>126</b>
7. Cartoon: 'Victory 194-', from the <i>Daily Worker</i> , 15 May 1940, p. 3.	<b>133</b>
8. Cartoon: 'Counsel for the Defence', from the <i>Manchester Guardian</i> , 19 April 1933, p. 10.	<b>148</b>

## Introduction

Writing on British scientists who became attracted to Soviet Communism in the 1930s, Diane Paul comments that ‘their Soviet Union was an imaginary country’. It ‘reflected their own most ardent hopes but little of a reality with which they had virtually no contact’.<sup>1</sup> This could be said not only in description of these scientists, but also of much of the British Left in the thirties. Furthermore, if reversed, the same could be said of the British Right, as the image its members had constructed of the USSR was a reflection of their own most ardent *fears*. So, despite the antagonism between these groups, Left and Right had something in common: the Soviet Union was central to many of their most basic assumptions and mythologies of the world.

The centrality of the Soviet Union seems most obvious when it comes to the British Left. As the only socialist state in the world, the USSR commanded the attention of socialists in Britain. If socialism worked well there, this could be used as evidence of the superiority of the system. However, for much of the Left, the Soviet Union was much more than an interesting case study. It was an inspiration. Without crushing the working class or elevating the capitalist elites, the Communist leaders appeared to be bringing progress and modernity to the Soviet lands. As the economic crisis hit Britain and the capitalist system seemed to crumble under the pressure, Soviet progress stood out even more, and Britain’s worst flaws were magnified by the comparison. While socialists disagreed as to how closely Britain should follow the Soviet model, almost all of them recognised that the fate of the British Left was tied to the Soviet Union, to lesser or greater extents. If the Soviet Union should fail to live up to their ideals, left-wingers stood to lose many of their hopes for the future of Britain and the world.

At first glance, it might seem strange to associate the British Right so closely with the Soviet Union and its Communist leaders. Right-wingers avoided all connections to the place, and loathed everything it stood for. It would appear that ideologies should be

---

<sup>1</sup> D. B. Paul, ‘A War on Two Fronts: J. B. S. Haldane and the Response to Lysenkoism in Britain’, *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1983), p. 11.

defined by their positive beliefs, rather than by a negative reaction, like the Right's rejection of the USSR. Nevertheless, hatred and fear of the USSR complemented the positive beliefs of the British Right after 1917. Conservatives and the Right were convinced of the superiority of capitalism as an economic model, and of their own suitability as guardians of power and wealth. But Soviet-style socialism threatened to overturn capitalism entirely and to dispossess them. Right-wingers supported the rights of the individual, rejecting the excessive centralisation of the state. Soviet socialism had collectivised the former Russian Empire and subjected the individual to the 'masses'. Conservatives in Britain celebrated 'the British way of life', and regarded tradition and institutionalised religion as the foundation of civilisation and social stability. And the Bolsheviks had ripped this foundation from under the feet of the privileged classes of Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, in the interwar years Soviet-style socialism seemed to be spreading. Right-wingers watched the rise of radical socialist parties with great dread. The Bolsheviks had, of course, seized power in Russia in 1917, dispossessing the capitalist and religious elites, and Communism appeared to be making inroads into Western Europe. In Germany, for instance, the Communists won 13.1 per cent of the votes in the 1930 election.<sup>3</sup> In Britain itself, the rise of the Labour Party had shocked the Right. Despite the comparative moderation of this movement, right-wingers worried that it was trying to import Soviet-style Communism by stealth. It seemed that parliamentary democracy had opened the door to the infiltration of Britain by Communism. As a result, the Soviet Union was conceptualised as a monster, justifying the fears of British right-wingers. It is one of the reasons that many of them were disposed to be tolerant of Hitler, at least for a while. They did not usually approve of his methods or support his politics, but they saw at once the safeguard he would become against a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. The 'Bolshevik bogey'<sup>4</sup> in the East influenced many of their decisions in these years, decisions that would have huge repercussions for Britain and Europe.

---

<sup>2</sup> G. C. Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right, 1918-1939* (London and Sydney, 1986), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> N. Laporte, 'Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity: The KPD and the Third Period, 1929-33' in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, ed. M. Worley (London, 2004), pp. 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1936, p. 8.

During the 1930s, right-wing anti-Sovietism was put under constant strain from external events, as Soviet successes appeared to undermine its judgments against socialism and the USSR. These successes came at a time of crisis in capitalism, as the depression wrought havoc on the lives of millions of people in Britain. Many on the Left blamed the crisis on the capitalist model, which had failed so spectacularly to withstand the pressure. The Right could not ignore this attack. Nor could it ignore the Left's comparisons of Britain's stagnation with Soviet buoyancy. Soviet industrial successes were presented by the Left as shining examples of what a socialist system could achieve, and were used to demand change to the British system. Then, later in the decade, when it began to appear that Hitler's aggression must be checked, the Left challenged British right-wingers to accept the policy of collective security with the USSR as an ally against the fascist states. The idea of such a partnership revolted many on the Right, but, as the menace of Hitler became increasingly clear, it was difficult to avoid making this concession. Finally, the magnificent war effort of the Soviet people after 1941 forced the Right to account for the fact that a socialist system had been able to sponsor such a huge effort, and apparently command such widespread support. These events challenged the intellectual foundations of right-wing anti-Sovietism, and compelled a number of right-wingers to revise their beliefs drastically.

It was also in the 1930s, however, that the faith of the mostly pro-Soviet Left was tested. Members of the Left had to cope with a string of events that undercut their positive conception of the Soviet Union. The excesses of the first Five Year Plan were widely reported in Britain, as was the embarrassing spectacle of the Moscow show trials. These events made it difficult for members of the pro-Soviet Left to justify their continuing belief in the basic goodness of the Soviet leaders. Indeed, small parts of the Left were unable to support pro-Sovietism at all, rejecting Stalin's leadership as anti-socialist. The position of these particular anti-Stalinists was bolstered by elements of Soviet foreign policy that went against Leninist principles. Left-wingers who were still pro-Soviet also struggled, sometimes, to excuse aspects of Soviet policy in places like Spain. Finally, with the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the outbreak of war in 1939, the Left was confronted with Stalin's apparent 'betrayal' of anti-fascist ideals. His subsequent invasions of eastern



Poland and Finland dismayed all but his most loyal admirers.<sup>5</sup> These events had a far-reaching impact on the Left's conception of the world, even after the Soviet Union became an ally in the struggle against Nazi Germany.

This dissertation will explore the public discourse of Left and Right between 1929 and 1943, tracing the evolution of attitudes to the Soviet Union as both sides attempted to cope with events that challenged their basic assumptions about Soviet affairs. It will investigate the sources of information on the USSR that were available for people in Britain in this period, and the ways in which this information was selected, interpreted or manipulated in order to reflect the outlook of the different groups. These outlooks will be referred to as 'paradigms' or 'worldviews'. They reflected either the ideologies and hopes of the Left for a better world, or the ideologies and fears of the Right—ideologies and fears linked to a massive material and emotional investment in the existing economic, social and religious order. In looking at these sources, I will analyse the ways in which people on either side coped with events or arguments that contradicted their beliefs. I will also discuss interactions between the anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet paradigms, and how these affected people's capacity to cope with inconvenient realities.

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Daily Herald*, 22 August 1939, p. 8; and *Reynolds News*, 24 September 1939, p. 6.

## **Chapter One**

### **Britain in the 1930s: the background**

In this chapter, I set out to do four things. Firstly, I will discuss the work of those scholars who have written about public discourse on the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Secondly, I will identify the ways in which the existing historiography of this topic has been constrained within parameters that this dissertation seeks to expand. Thirdly, I will lay out the sources and methodology I will be using, showing the potential problems and benefits of my approach. Finally I will discuss the context for the period 1929 to 1943 and the different groups who lived through it, showing the underlying attitudes and pressures that shaped people's attitudes to the USSR at the time.

Historians have usually explored public discourse of the USSR by looking either at specific groups or at the responses of various groups to specific events. In this dissertation, by contrast, I attempt to look at the ways in which the views of anti-Soviets and pro-Soviets interacted, and I seek to place their debates in the proper historical context. Those who were sympathetic to the USSR, and those who were hostile to it, competed with each other to influence public opinion. As a result, they inevitably had to attack the views of rival groups at the same time as defending their own positions against hostile attack. Therefore, attitudes to the Soviet Union were not formed in a vacuum, but they evolved as part of an ongoing debate. Likewise, that debate was not immune to the wider political struggles that took place in Britain in the 1930s. On the contrary, the views that people expressed about the Soviet Union were almost always linked to the positions they took on a range of domestic and international political issues. For this reason, an analysis of public discourse of the Soviet Union in the 1930s must be rooted in its historical and political context.

## The historiography

There are a number of important books devoted to British responses to the Soviet Union in the period in question. Most deal with relations between the British Left and the Soviet Union. James Jupp, Kevin Morgan, and Andrew Thorpe have all written monographs that deal with the relationship of the radical Left, in particular the Communist Party, to Moscow.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Paul Corthorn, Bill Jones, and Andrew J. Williams have written specifically about Labour and the Left's response to the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> While some of these historians, like Corthorn, focus mainly on the views of prominent individuals within political hierarchies, others such as Morgan look more widely at the public discourse of these social movements, and at the rank-and-file activists who were involved in them. David Caute's *The Fellow-Travellers* is written in a very different and rather entertaining style. It describes and often pillories the left-wingers in the Western world who became most attached to the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

There are no extended studies on the reactions of the British Right to the Soviet Union. Some books are particularly useful, such as Richard Griffiths' *Fellow-Travellers of the Right* or Franklin Reid Gannon's *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939*.<sup>9</sup> However, both books focus on reactions to Nazi Germany, in which the Soviet Union necessarily plays a part, but does not dominate. This is typical of studies of the right wing. The crucial role of the Soviet Union in the Right's worldview is usually acknowledged, but it is hardly ever studied for its own sake, except in a few articles dealing with small groups of people.<sup>10</sup> There is only one book that deals with the attitudes to the Soviet Union of

---

<sup>6</sup> J. Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain, 1931-1941* (London, 1982); A. Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester and New York, 2000); and K. Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist politics, 1935-41* (Manchester, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> P. Corthorn, *In the Shadow of the Dictators: The British Left in the 1930s* (London and New York, 2006); B. Jones, *The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 1977); and A. J. Williams, *Labour and Russia: The attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR, 1924-34* (Manchester and New York, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> D. Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> R. Griffiths, *Fellow-Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (London, 1980); and F. R. Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> For example, M. Hendley, 'Anti-Alienism and the Primrose League: The Externalization of the Postwar Crisis in Great Britain 1918-32', *Albion*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 243-269; A. McIvor, '"A Crusade for Capitalism": The Economic League, 1919-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 4 (October 1988), pp. 631-655; R. Schinness, 'An Early Pilgrimage to Soviet Russia: Four Conservative M.P.s Challenge Tory Party Policy', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September

both the Left and the Right, namely, *Britain and Soviet Communism* by F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells.<sup>11</sup> It is a useful book, but, as it spans the history of British-Soviet relations from the Revolution up until the time of publication, in 1982, its coverage of the period covered by this thesis is necessarily cursory.

Other historians touch on the importance of Soviet affairs even though they focus on different topics. The historiography surrounding the issue of appeasement in the late 1930s naturally acknowledges the role of the Soviet Union in contemporary debates about appeasement and collective security. Diplomatic histories do the same, and several deal specifically with Anglo-Soviet relations. For instance, Curtis Keeble's study of British-Soviet relations between 1917 and 1989 is particularly useful in this sense. Keith Neilson's recent monograph is also a general history of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy from 1919 to 1939. In addition, Gordon W. Morrell's *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution* covers the diplomacy surrounding the Metropolitan-Vickers crisis of 1933.<sup>12</sup> Books about international interest in the Spanish Civil War or the popular fronts also add something to the history of the Left and its relations with the Soviet Union in this period. Jim Fyrth's *Britain, Fascism, and the Popular Front*, for example, contains important perspectives on this facet of the British relationship with the USSR.<sup>13</sup> More generally, books about the 1930s have recognised the Soviet Union's key place in British thought during these years. Malcolm Muggeridge's *The Thirties*, written in 1940, is one influential book of this type.<sup>14</sup>

A prominent feature of the historiography is its interest in certain groups and individuals on the Left. Intellectuals have figured heavily and controversially, in studies like Cate's, or Neal Wood's *Communism and British Intellectuals*. There have been biographies of

---

1975), pp. 623-631; and K. D. Brown, 'The Anti-Socialist Union, 1908-49', in *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, ed. K. D. Brown (London, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> F. S. Northedge and A. Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* (London, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> G. W. Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution: Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1995); K. Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia, and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 2006); and C. Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-89* (London, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> J. Fyrth (ed.), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> M. Muggeridge, *The Thirties: 1930-1940 in Great Britain* (London, 1940).

prominent intellectuals such as John Strachey, Harold J. Laski and H. N. Brailsford.<sup>15</sup> The political involvement of artists and scientists has also been a key theme of the historiography, and in some respects has become part of the mythology of the 1930s. Gary Werskey's *The Visible College* is a key text dealing with some of the scientists who found themselves drawn to Communism in this period, while the artistic elite is described in other books, such as *The Thirties*, by Julian Symons, and *The Auden Generation*, by Samuel Hynes.<sup>16</sup> There is also a small historiography surrounding the Left Book Club and other left-wing publications. Much of this is more descriptive than analytical,<sup>17</sup> but Kevin Morgan's work on the Left Book Club is much more probing.<sup>18</sup>

Debates in the historiography often centre around the question of moral culpability. Historians such as Cate, Jones, Jonathan Davis and Northedge and Wells sometimes suggest that pro-Soviets did their best either to ignore all evidence of Soviet crimes, or to justify and applaud them. Neal Wood is unwilling to go quite so far in his critique of pro-Soviet apologists, but he does imply that too many of Stalin's crimes were excused uncritically by those who were sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The most damning critique of pro-Soviet intellectuals appears in the analysis of Cate, in his book *The Fellow-Travellers*, and also in the work of some scholars who have written about the response of the British Left to the Moscow show trials or the Nazi-Soviet Pact.<sup>19</sup> However, more recent historians, such as Paul Corthorn and Andrew J. Williams, defend pro-Soviet observers, claiming they did in fact criticise the excesses of the Soviet leaders.

---

<sup>15</sup> N. Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London, 1959); M. Newman, *John Strachey* (Manchester and New York, 1989); P. Lamb, 'Harold Laski (1893-1950): Political Theorist of a World in Crisis', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 329-342; and F. M. Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and His World* (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> G. Werskey, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s* (London, 1978); J. Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London, 1960); and S. Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> For example, J. Lewis, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (London, 1970); G. B. Neavill, 'Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club', *The Library Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3 (July 1971), pp. 197-215; Symons, pp. 99-109; and S. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 2, Left-wing Intellectuals between the Wars (1966), pp. 65-86.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, *Against Fascism*, pp. 255-271; and K. Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, vol. 1, *Labour Legends and Russian Gold* (London, 2006), pp. 263-266, 273.

<sup>19</sup> Cate, *Fellow-Travellers*, pp. 7, 12-14, 72-79, 114-131; Jones, pp. 11-30; Northedge and Wells, pp. 146-147, 153, 161-180, 241-242; Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 42-50; P. Corthorn and J. Davis (eds.), *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Policies, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (London and New York, 2008), p. 84; and H. Dewar, 'The Moscow Trials', reprinted from *Survey*, no. 41 (April 1962), p. 2, on <<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/dewar/1962/04/trials.htm>> (3 June 2010).

These historians also explain why in certain cases it was not possible or practical for pro-Soviet contemporaries to criticise the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

The historiography as it stands is very useful, but it misses crucial aspects of the British reaction to the USSR. Attitudes to the Soviet Union underpinned the fundamental beliefs of both Left and Right in this period. In the early 1930s, many people on the Left looked to the Soviet Union, the only socialist state in the world, as an inspiration, while the Right tended to view the Bolshevik State as the embodiment of evil. Both worldviews developed, changing some things and retaining others, and previous studies have largely ignored the many different forces that simultaneously shaped the evolution of these attitudes.

For instance, most studies focus on the attitudes to the Soviet Union of particular groups. This has, of course, allowed most historians to focus more carefully on the details of their chosen subjects. However, in so doing they usually overlook the interplay of left-wing and right-wing discourses. The reactions of Left and Right to each other were a crucial element in their reactions to the Soviet Union too. This is very difficult to acknowledge or reveal in studies which concentrate only on one group, or which deal with Left and Right as if they did not exist in the same time and space. Northedge and Wells, for example, have written a book about both sides and their response to the Soviet state, but hardly ever look at the interactions between these two sides. Andrew J. Williams in his study of the Labour Party does attempt more successfully to show some of the ways in which the Right played a crucial part in the reaction of Labourites to the Soviet Union, but his study goes no further than 1934. James Jupp touches on this too, but only lightly.<sup>21</sup>

Historians have also tended to focus on a few prominent individuals. Like the emphasis on political parties or single groups, this can obscure the importance of opposing sides, but it also creates an impression of British society as a whole that is not typical. George Orwell is, rightly, a prominent character in the historiography of the 1930s, but he was not at all representative. As Paul Corthorn writes, the emphasis placed on the unique

---

<sup>20</sup> Williams, pp. 241-243; and Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, p. 178; and Jupp, pp. 89, 198.

way Orwell responded to events has 'prevented an appreciation of the intricate range of responses to these events on the non-Communist left'.<sup>22</sup> Other individuals who have attracted a significant amount of attention in the historiography include Sidney and Beatrice Webb, or the pro-Communists D. N. Pritt and Hewlett Johnson, whose reactions to the USSR were often remarkably delusional. They are, perhaps, so unusual and so quotable that it is tempting to startle the reader by dwelling for the most part on their foibles. Sometimes, on the other hand, all the attention is on politicians and diplomats, without any attention to the public opinion and the influence of mass media from which politicians and diplomats are not immune. Gordon W. Morrell's study of the Metro-Vickers crisis, for example, hardly scratches the surface of the furious debate that took place in British newspapers for months on the subject. Instead, he focuses exclusively on diplomats and their staffs.

Another factor in the evolution of worldviews was the interaction of events one with another. However, a number of studies focus on the way British public discourse dealt with single events, excluding reactions to events that were happening at the same time. Morrell's book on the Metro-Vickers crisis, again, is an example of this, while a number of articles, such as Hugo Dewar's, focus on the Moscow show trials without referring to simultaneous events. This is very problematic, because none of the people who responded to Soviet affairs were making their decisions in a vacuum. In fact, their reactions were moderated or exaggerated by a large number of competing events and pressures. For example, the Stalinist terror and the show trials occurred at precisely the same time as the Spanish Civil War, with the larger theme of the rise of fascism in the background. In order to understand the response of commentators in Britain to events like the show trials, historians must take into account the wider background to them. Attitudes to the Soviet Union in this period were always shaped by a large and varied group of concurrent pressures.

A different problem, with a smaller section of the historiography, is that it is politically loaded. Some of it is tarred with the Cold War brush, which assumed one or the other side was evil or dangerous. In Gabriel Almond's study of *The Appeals of Communism*, for

---

<sup>22</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, p. 6.

example, he describes his work as an attempt to understand the mindset of the 'emotionally maladjusted' people who became Communists in this period. This presupposition is clearly biased.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, some historians of the Left have brought their own assumptions to their history. Noreen Branson, for example, in her chapter on 'Myths From Right and Left' in Jim Fyrth's book, ascribes all lies in and after the 1930s to the Conservatives and to Trotsky. The Communist Party, in her opinion, made no mistakes whatsoever.<sup>24</sup> On both sides, diplomatic histories of the events leading up to the Second World War have also tended to be preoccupied with finger-pointing.<sup>25</sup> This type of history is not interested in explaining, but only in condemning. It does not show how or why people responded to events in ways that have been criticised.

I hope to avoid some of these pitfalls, and to provide a different point of view. Firstly, I have concentrated on the 'public discourse' as shown in newspapers, journals and other publications that were readily available during this period. This brings out the reactions of politicians and diplomats, intellectuals and artists, but also journalists, activists and the vocal public. By looking at the publications of both Left and Right and those in-between, it is possible to see more clearly the interactions between all these different strands of thought, and how they influenced each other, at the time. Secondly, I hope to bring out the interaction of pressures on individual or group responses to events. Instead of looking at one event in isolation, I will show how parallel events restricted an objective stance on that single event. An individual's reaction to the USSR was almost always modified by the pressure of opposition, or the pressure of other events.

Finally, I hope to consider the coping mechanisms that enabled individuals from all different groups to sustain their own positions. Everyone who took a stance on the Soviet Union in this period was forced to account for developments that seemed to contradict their most basic assumptions about the USSR. I will analyse the ways in which individuals and groups coped with these challenges to their intellectual foundations, showing how pro-Sovietism and anti-Sovietism were sustained or adapted. I will also

---

<sup>23</sup> G. A. Almond, *The Appeals of Communism* (Princeton, 1954), p. 216.

<sup>24</sup> N. Branson, 'Myths From Right and Left', in Fyrth, pp. 115-130.

<sup>25</sup> P. W. Doerr, "'Frigid but Unprovocative": British Policy towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36, no. 3 (July 2001), p. 423.



consider the patterns that emerged across the political divide, in the techniques used by pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet observers to attack the opposition and sustain their own beliefs. Finally, I will discuss the options pro-Soviets or anti-Soviets faced when they felt reality could no longer be assimilated into their fundamental beliefs.

### **The public discourse**

One of the main sources of information for this dissertation is a selection of British newspapers and journals. These include some of the major daily newspapers—the *Daily Mail*, the *Times*, the *Daily Herald*—and less well-read but equally significant daily newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Worker*. On the extreme Right, I have looked at the *Fascist Quarterly* and the *British Union Quarterly*. Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Catholic Times* could also be described as extreme, but extreme in their staunch conservatism. More moderate right-wing publications include the *Times*, which was the voice of the Establishment, with a reputation for echoing the Conservative or National Governments.<sup>26</sup> The weekly *English Review* and *National Review*, as well as the monthly *Primrose League Gazette*, are also placed on the moderate Right. A more complicated grouping are Liberal publications such as the *Economist* and the *Manchester Guardian*, which were quite dissimilar in their stance on the Soviet Union, despite their Liberal origins. The *Economist* was certainly in the anti-Soviet camp ideologically, although it was by no means as critical as conservative anti-Soviets.<sup>27</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, however, was increasingly influenced by left-wing ideas about the Soviet Union. Although it was never so ideologically committed to pro-Sovietism as the publications of Labour and the Left, it can be described in this period as moderately pro-Soviet, and sympathetic to left-wing views of the world, as Gannon writes.<sup>28</sup>

On the Left, the range of voices was even more complicated. As the official organ of the Labour Party, the *Daily Herald* was moderately pro-Soviet, but it was also marked by its

---

<sup>26</sup> Gannon, pp. 56-74.

<sup>27</sup> B. Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s* (Exeter, 1991), pp. 16-19.

<sup>28</sup> Gannon, pp. 24, 74-76.

opposition to Soviet-style Marxism, leading to tensions on some issues. It was the most popular left-wing publication, with a circulation of more than two million.<sup>29</sup> The *New Leader* was the official weekly voice of the Independent Labour Party, while the *Daily Worker* represented the Communist Party from 1930.<sup>30</sup> *Reynolds News*, the voice of the Co-operative Movement, was more independent, however, as was the influential *New Statesman and Nation*. Both of these weekly journals were committed to a pro-Soviet point of view despite their independence from political control.<sup>31</sup> *Left News*, organ of the Left Book Club, was a special case. Technically independent, but influenced heavily by the Communist Party, it presented one of the more consistently pro-Soviet points of view outside the *Daily Worker* up until the end of 1939.<sup>32</sup> The left-wing anti-Stalinist publications, such as *The Militant*, *Action*, or *Fight*, stood somewhere outside of this, usually surviving only short periods and representing Trotskyist or non-Communist revolutionary thought.

I have also made use of the wide variety of books and pamphlets that were published in the 1930s and early 1940s about the Soviet Union or influenced by the Soviet Union. These include the writings of left-wingers, dissidents on the Left, and right-wingers of different shades. One movement that does stand out is the Left Book Club, in existence from 1936. The Club was strongly influenced by pro-Sovietism. It published political books every month, as well as its own journal, the *Left News*, with the aim of averting war and building a popular front against fascism. As it captured the imaginations of many on the Left who were most concerned by the threat of Hitler, it was extremely influential, and its publications have been very useful for the purposes of this study, as the Soviet Union was so fundamental to its desire for collective security against Hitler. It also captured the imagination of the Right in an entirely different way, as right-wingers became extremely concerned by the dynamism of Left publishing, and made their own unsuccessful attempts at reproducing a similar movement on the Right.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Gannon, pp. 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> K. Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, vol. 2, *The Webbs and Soviet Communism* (London, 2006), pp. 142-143, 150-151.

<sup>31</sup> Morris, pp. 24, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Symons, pp. 103-104.

<sup>33</sup> E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 135-155.

Otherwise, archival sources have contributed in some measure to this project. A small number of documents from the National Archives were useful, but, as I am concentrating on public discourse, what went on behind the scenes has been helpful only in some instances. However, the Mass-Observation Archive has been particularly helpful as a source of information on public attitudes to the USSR from the late 1930s onwards, and especially in the period of the wartime alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union. Mass-Observation was a movement beginning in the late 1930s that aimed to observe and record the events and opinions of everyday life. With the help of hundreds of 'observers', it collected thousands of fragments of comment on many different topics, as well as gathering diaries and taking surveys from regular respondents. These have been very valuable in getting some idea of how a greater mass of people responded to events concerning the Soviet Union.

Of course, this project only skims the surface of the public discourse of fourteen years, both in its choice of sources and the nature of the sources themselves. This dissertation will be weighted towards the more easily accessible views of professional writers and public or political figures, who are easiest to trace throughout the period. This is especially the case earlier in the 1930s, when Mass-Observation was not in existence. In any case the evidence offered by Mass-Observation is not a definitive reflection of public discourse en masse but of the opinions of individuals, offered casually. It is limited also by the fact that in many cases it is impossible to know basic facts about the people whose opinions are recorded, such as their political affiliations, or how their opinions had developed or would develop later. In newspapers, letters to the editor are useful for the historian, but these were usually sent in by the more actively involved members of the public. The more apathetic, or those who were simply not interested in the question of the Soviet Union, are hidden from view for the most part. Therefore, I will inevitably miss some points of view, and will have to rely on individual rather than mass opinion.

It should be remembered, however, that, despite these limitations, newspapers and journals are fruitful sources for historians. The media did have an effect on public opinion, and reflected public opinion, although not perfectly. The newspapers of Britain, especially those with a mass circulation, relied on their readers, who chose the papers they purchased based on the partisan view each newspaper put forward—although not

always for this reason alone. In fact, when a newspaper put forward an unpopular line in the 1930s, it often found itself forced to amend this, as readership dropped. Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, for instance, was forced in 1933 to be slightly less enthusiastic about the Nazis than he would have liked,<sup>34</sup> while on the other hand the *Morning Post* went out of business due to its uniformly scathing coverage of the Nazis.<sup>35</sup> Public discourse, therefore, can provide an indication of public opinion.

More importantly, however, sources that record public discourse are extremely useful for the purposes of this study. They are inherently biased, subjective and selective. They do not necessarily reflect what their authors thought at the time, as there were many reasons to hold back judgment or conceal one's true opinions. These are attributes that would normally be seen as negative or unhelpful, but in a study such as this they can be used to explain much that is unclear, by helping us to understand the information that was available. If they were our only source of information on what was happening in the USSR at the time, we would have an extremely warped and confusing image of the Soviet Union. And so the distortedness of the picture formed by these sources is interesting in itself. By acknowledging the difficulty of knowing 'the truth' about the Soviet Union at the time, it becomes easier to understand how and why individuals coped with challenges, justifying events that with hindsight and more information are unjustifiable. In this sense, these people's bias and lack of clarity is extremely useful, revealing the subjective responses of people who did not have all the facts. Consequently, this study will not attempt to speak for the internal thoughts and struggles of everybody in Britain from 1929 to 1943. Instead, it considers what was readily available and in the public eye, and how people who put themselves into the public discourse coped publicly with challenges to their worldviews.

### **Britain in the 1930s: the context**

A brief discussion of terminology is necessary before looking further into the groups whose public discourse I will examine. Firstly, throughout this dissertation, I will refer to

---

<sup>34</sup> Jupp, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Gannon, pp. 49-50.

‘pro-Soviets’ and ‘anti-Soviets’—a division which is central to my analysis. The people I refer to as ‘anti-Soviet’ are those I understand to be committed to a worldview that rejected Soviet ideology and practice in general, as it stood in this period. They believed that the Soviet Union or its leaders were basically evil. ‘Pro-Soviets’, on the other hand, were those who were committed to a worldview which supported Soviet practice and ideology in general. This worldview was based on a belief that the Soviet Union was basically good. Though necessary to my analysis, this division is admittedly a simplistic one. ‘Anti-Soviet’ will most often be identified with the Right, and ‘pro-Soviet’ most often with the Left, but the members of each camp were extremely diverse, and in significant cases these lines of Left and Right were blurred. Some left-wingers became anti-Soviets without becoming right-wingers, and a few right-wingers became pro-Soviets without becoming left-wingers. In the following section, I will describe in more detail the subtleties of both categories.

I have placed people whose outlook on the Soviet Union was very critical in the ‘anti-Soviet’ category. The variety within this category is very great. For the most part, it includes a wide range of right-wing anti-Soviets—conservatives of all shades, and extreme right-wing groups such as the fascists—who rejected the whole project of socialism in the Soviet Union as evil. The Soviet system, they believed, was godless and incompatible with a civilised society. Secondly, there were a number of moderate left-wing and liberal anti-Soviets who did not necessarily reject socialism but who rejected the Soviet state as a whole for its oppressive, anti-democratic policies. This would include some leaders of the Labour Party or the trade unions. For instance, Sir Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), believed that Soviet industrialisation was a ‘great constructive work’, but that the system had veered closer to ‘State Capitalism’ than to true socialism. It had slipped hopelessly away from the ‘ethical standards’ set for it at the time of the revolution.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, radical left-wing anti-Soviets based their criticism of the Soviet Union on Marxist ideology. They saw Stalinism as a ‘betrayal’ of Leninism, and believed that Stalin was not a true revolutionary. These anti-Soviets were splintered into a number of groups such as the Trotskyists, the anarchists and other small left-wing sects.

---

<sup>36</sup> W. Citrine, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (London, 1938), pp. 43, 87, 103, 117-121, 131, 134, 411-413.

The majority of the anti-Soviets on whom this study focuses were Conservatives, or identified themselves with the Conservative Party. Some were Liberals, but as the Conservatives became the favourite of those who opposed Labour this party lost power and relevance.<sup>37</sup> Conservative beliefs centred around the protection of private property and the defence of the capitalist status quo. Conservatives also believed in the decentralisation of government power as much as possible, although they rejected ideas of completely unrestricted economics.<sup>38</sup> In the 1930s, Conservatives increasingly constructed themselves as an anti-socialist force. Worried by what they perceived as an attack by socialists on religion, on the family, and on the economic system that had consolidated their dominance in society, they responded vigorously but usually in negative forms.<sup>39</sup> The Conservative Party was without question the dominant party in the interwar years, drawing its support from the upper and middle classes as a whole, but sometimes from the working classes too. After the Labour Government collapsed in 1931, the Conservatives controlled the National Government, until the formation of a genuine coalition government in 1940.<sup>40</sup>

In these years, people on the Right were dissatisfied with the status quo. Many right-wingers were profoundly uneasy with the direction British politics appeared to be taking. The legacy of the Great War had been the collapse of empires, revolutions, and rising unrest among the European working classes.<sup>41</sup> The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had been founded in 1920, and, though it remained small in size, it was extremely active and vocal. Far more important was the Labour Party, which had been growing in size and strength since the first decade of the twentieth century, and which had been able to form minority governments in 1923 and 1929. The ruling classes worried that the rise of 'democracy' in Britain would establish the rule of the unwashed, both aesthetically and politically. Conservatives now looked back on the Edwardian era through rose-tinted glasses. It had been an era of 'integrity'. It had been an era of

---

<sup>37</sup> A. Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 33-40; and R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 276-277.

<sup>38</sup> R. J. White (ed.), *The Conservative Tradition* (London, 1950), pp. 73, 76, 90, 91, 109, 217.

<sup>39</sup> McKibbin, pp. 275, 281; and Green, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> J. Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (New York, 1996), pp. 79, 82, 93, 105; and McKibbin, pp. 259-260, 281, 288-290.

<sup>41</sup> Charmley, p. 64.

‘vigour’. It had been an era in which their control had seemed unassailable. Now, despite their continuing political dominance, Conservatism seemed increasingly under siege from sinister forces, internally and externally.<sup>42</sup> The Soviet attempt to build a solid industrial base through socialist methods, while Britain was going through one of its worst economic crises, was a challenge that only intensified this pressure.

Some of those who were disappointed with the Conservative Party’s inability to construct an identity as a positive, vigorous force found themselves attracted to fascism in these years. Fascism was an alternative that seemed to promise a more rigorous rejection of socialism, at a time when the paranoia engineered on the Right about the advances of socialism could be intense. So the British Union of Fascists (BUF), led by Oswald Mosley, gained admirers from a wide range of political backgrounds, including Lord Rothermere, who would normally have supported the Conservatives. Mosley himself had been on the left of the Labour Party.<sup>43</sup> However, the BUF also attracted right-wingers of an even more extreme kind than Rothermere, ‘revolutionary nationalists’ whose political beliefs revolved around their extreme anti-Semitism and anti-Communism.<sup>44</sup> It had some success in the early 1930s, reaching a peak of 40,000 members in 1934, according to some sources. However, this blend of right-wing Conservatives and genuine fascists was not a workable arrangement. The increasing violence associated with the movement from 1934 also drove away large numbers. The BUF thereafter became less and less representative, and was always a minority, even though it remained vocal, with a significant presence in some areas.<sup>45</sup>

The anti-Stalinist Left can also be placed in the anti-Soviet category. Its members would have been uncomfortable with this description, and so we must recognise that these left-wing dissidents were not necessarily opposed to the Soviet Union itself, or to its people and its socialism. In fact, in many cases the publications of the anti-Stalinist Left exhorted their readers to ‘defend the Soviet Union’ against the warmongering of the

---

<sup>42</sup> J. Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London, 1967), pp. 25-26; and Webber, pp. 16, 36, 56, 66, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Webber, pp. 28-29, 33; and Harrison, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> N. Copsey and D. Renton, *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (New York, 2005), p. 27; N. Nugent and R. King, *The British Right: Conservative and right wing politics in Britain* (Farnborough, 1977), p. 156; and *Fascist Quarterly*, January 1935, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Webber, pp. 43, 45-46; Griffiths, p. 15; and Copsey and Renton, p. 27.

Right.<sup>46</sup> However, they were fundamentally opposed to the Soviet leadership which, they believed, had corrupted socialism, Marxism or Leninism. This anti-Stalinism affected their response to the Soviet Union in general. The organised anti-Stalinist Left, in its more revolutionary groups such as the Trotskyists, was thinly represented in Britain, and was not particularly visible in the public discourse. Some individuals managed to be heard on the Left. George Orwell would spring to most minds, for example, but he did not perfectly fit into any one group of dissidents. The same can be said for other prominent radical dissidents such as Lancelot Hogben. Most of these anti-Soviets will only feature briefly in this dissertation, as they formed only a small, albeit significant, part of the public discourse.

Pro-Soviets were also a very diverse group, although not quite so politically diverse as anti-Soviets. Most pro-Soviets were on the political Left, although some people of a Liberal background, as featured in the *Manchester Guardian*, for instance, were of a pro-Soviet inclination. Communists made up one of the most significant minorities in this category, with their special relationship to the Soviet leadership and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They believed the Soviet model in its entirety was applicable to Britain. They were joined by a few individuals, such as John Strachey or J. B. S. Haldane, who were not Party members, for various reasons, but who were nevertheless devoted adherents of the Communist cause. Secondly, the pro-Soviet category held many people who were Soviet sympathisers or fellow travellers. This was a diverse grouping. It included the more extreme left-wing supporters of Labour or the Independent Labour Party (ILP), but also included moderates on the Left. Moderate supporters of Labour, or Liberals, did not like every feature of Soviet socialism, but believed that the Soviet Union was fundamentally a progressive, socialist state and therefore it deserved support. Thirdly, the pro-Soviet category included a number of professional individuals such as scientists or engineers who admired specific achievements of the Soviet state and allowed these to affect their views on the Soviet Union as a whole.

---

<sup>46</sup> For example, *The Militant*, 1 January 1940, pp. 1-2.



In this period, the generally pro-Soviet Left was dissatisfied, like the Right, but in reverse. Progress was not coming fast enough. The devastation of the Great War had radicalised many left-wingers, and the events of the past decade had not altered their conviction that something was terribly wrong with capitalist society.<sup>47</sup> The defection of Ramsay MacDonald from the Labour Party in 1931 seemed to show that something was wrong even with social democracy.<sup>48</sup> The final nail in capitalism's coffin, as many saw it, was the economic slump that hit the capitalist world in 1929. This was a deeply embittering experience, as millions became unemployed in Britain and across the world, and the capitalist leaders seemed unable to do a single thing about it. In this atmosphere, the efforts of the Soviet Union to industrialise through socialist planning became extremely relevant. Its vibrancy in the face of monumental opposition was inspiring, and made Britain's decline seem all the worse. By the early thirties, much of the Left was thoroughly disaffected with Britain's system, looking instead to the Soviet Union for hope.<sup>49</sup>

The Labour Party dominated the Left, as the main party of the opposition and even the party of government from 1929 to 1931. For the most part, its policies supported socialism by gradual and careful degrees, working within the capitalist framework. It was thoroughly opposed to revolution and to Communism, although it recognised the socialist base of the Soviet Union. However, other groups abounded. The Independent Labour Party (ILP), for example, was associated with the Labour Party until 1932, and then split from it because it believed the leaders of the Labour Party were too moderate.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, there were always tensions between the restraint of Labour's leaders, and the enthusiasms of the rank and file, who often demanded a more uncompromising stand on the Soviet Union than the leaders of the party and the trade unions were willing to offer.<sup>51</sup> The collapse of the Labour Government in 1931, and the movement of some Labourites into the National Government, complicated matters further, radicalising many members, who now questioned whether gradualism was

---

<sup>47</sup> Gannon, pp. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> J. Rodden, 'On the Political Sociology of Intellectuals: George Orwell and the London Left Intelligentsia of the 1930s', *Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Summer, 1990), p. 255.

<sup>50</sup> Corthorn, *In the shadow*, pp. 9, 11; and Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, pp. 15-16.

possible. The leftward flow reversed later in the decade, however, when capitalism stabilised and gradualism seemed wise once more.<sup>52</sup>

Communists were one of the most important minorities on the Left. The CPGB was born in 1920. The majority of its members were working class, although in the 1930s it began attracting more members from the middle classes.<sup>53</sup> Although some historians have emphasised that they were few in number, others insist that they punched above their weight. The CPGB was very active in the public sphere, and in important movements like the National Unemployed Workers' Movement of the depression years. During the early years of the 1930s it was hamstrung by the 'Social Fascist' line, which alienated other elements of the Left and kept its membership low. With the adoption of the 'popular front' line in 1935, however, the CPGB was in a better position to influence the wider Left, as it sought links with other socialists and promoted active anti-fascism. In this period it doubled its membership. Later, during the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and Britain, its growth was even more spectacular.<sup>54</sup> In the 1930s, the CPGB was bound increasingly to Moscow, and to Stalinist orthodoxy, and it took on a role as spokesperson and apologist for the Soviet state and for Marxism more generally. This was often quite problematic, but, as Communists themselves believed that their highest duty was the defence of the Soviet Union, it was their first priority.<sup>55</sup>

The Soviet Union had been extremely significant to both pro-Soviets and anti-Soviets since the November 1917 revolution. For the Left, there was friction in the relationship with the Soviet Union; as the Labour Party and the trade unions discovered, Communist infiltration had to be resisted, and Soviet aid was not always helpful. The Labour Party's anti-Communism, however, was almost always differentiated from its support for the only socialist state in the world.<sup>56</sup> From the earliest time of Allied intervention in the Soviet lands, the Left and its rank and file had mobilised vigorously against capitalist

---

<sup>52</sup> Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, pp. 25-28, 33; and Corthorn, *In the shadow*, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> K. Morgan, G. Cohen and A. Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London, 2007), p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> J. McIlroy, 'The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism 1928-1933', *Past & Present*, no. 192 (August 2006), p. 188; J. Stevenson and C. Cook, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics, 1929-1939* (London, 1994), p. 162; Jupp, pp. 19, 31; Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, pp. 225, 235; and Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 256.

<sup>55</sup> Jupp, pp. 132-133; Morgan, *Against Fascism*, p. 66; and McIlroy, pp. 189, 223.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, pp. 18-19, 27-28, 37; Jones (1977), pp. 7-9; and Northedge and Wells, p. 184-185.

interference in Soviet affairs. They came to distrust the Right, assuming that it would do whatever it could to undermine Soviet attempts at progress, which they felt should be given a fair chance.<sup>57</sup> Simultaneously, their disgust at right-wing journalism grew. 'Tory lies' had produced the ridiculous rumours of the Bolsheviks' nationalisation of women, soon after the revolution, and continued to produce stories that seemed self-evidently false.<sup>58</sup> In most adherents of the Left there grew a strong compulsion to defend the Soviet Union from reactionary right-wingers. Socialism was, increasingly, their only hope for the world; therefore, the only socialist state must be defended. Sometimes, its sins might be glossed over as irrelevant when so much was at stake.<sup>59</sup> And so the Soviet Union became one of the only things which united the Left, in the 1920s, as it pulled together against right-wing attack.

The Soviet Union fitted just as perfectly into the insecurities and fears of the British Right. For Conservatives and the Right, the birth of the Soviet Union provided, in a sense, a useful enemy, useful in the sense that it could be used to explain the growth of working class unrest and the increasing power of the Labour Party.<sup>60</sup> There was a genuine fear of Bolshevik expansionism, which was seen as one of the most fundamental doctrines of Communism. Many believed in sinister forces working behind the scenes to subvert the 'British way of life' and destroy Western civilisation.<sup>61</sup> This fear of alien involvement was compounded by events like the forged 'Zinoviev letter' of 1924, the General Strike in 1926 and the Arcos raid of 1927, all of which seemed to point to Soviet interference in Britain. These events bred a strong distrust of even the moderate Left, which, right-wingers suspected, was a mask behind which Bolsheviks lurked.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *The Impact of the Russian Revolution 1917-1967: The Influence of Bolshevism on the World Outside Russia* (London, 1967), p. 4; Corthorn and Davis, pp. 67-68; and Jones, pp. 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, pp. 16, 109-110.

<sup>59</sup> Northedge and Wells, pp. 145-146, 185; and Jones, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> A. Aughey, G. Jones and W. T. M. Riches (eds.), *The Conservative Political Tradition in Britain and the United States* (London, 1992), p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> N. Webster, *The Origin and Progress of the World Revolution* (London, 1932), pp. 2-14; N. Nugent and R. King (eds.), *The British Right: Conservative and right wing politics in Britain* (Farnborough, 1977), p. 156; Webber, p. 36; and Hendley, p. 244.

<sup>62</sup> Northedge and Wells, p. 144; Williams, p. 17; and Aughey, Jones and Riches, pp. 145-146.

## Conclusion

This was a Britain that was profoundly divided. Curtis Keeble refers to the division over the Soviet Union as a 'great schism'.<sup>63</sup> Both sides learned to be deeply distrustful of each other, and likely, in most important situations, to react against each other as well as to the events themselves. In 1940, Malcolm Muggeridge described the situation this produced:

[The conflict] expresses a deep cleavage of opinion, a deep discord between two expressions of the same spirit of romantic materialism—a Brave New World and a Brave Old World facing one another and menacingly flourishing the same weapons. More and more this conflict came to provide the underlying pattern of thought, whether in politics, literature or religion.

It became an obsession from which no one was wholly immune, creeping into novels, plays, poems, literary criticism, sermons, lectures, conversation, films, music-hall turns. Spain provided an actual battleground where some shed their blood, undergraduates breaking off their studies to man machine-guns; and in the ideological fray all could join everywhere.<sup>64</sup>

Much of this conflict hinged on views of the Soviet Union. Left-wing paradigms of the world had a positive view of the Soviet Union at the centre; for the right-wing paradigms, the position of the Soviet Union was also central, but negative.

In many people, as a result, there grew a strong emotional commitment to one paradigm or the other, and the different camps maintained a large personal investment in their paradigm of choice. For people on the Right, anti-Sovietism was a defence of their most cherished values against the onslaught of the worst features of modernity. For those on the Left, the Soviet Union became a kind of substitute homeland, a vessel for all the hopes their own country could not fulfil. It was tempting to avoid questioning these comfortable beliefs and assumptions, especially as the world outside seemed to

---

<sup>63</sup> Keeble, pp. 117-118.

<sup>64</sup> Muggeridge, p. 24.

become a darker, more disappointing place. As George Orwell wrote, it was most comfortable to remain, unlike Jonah, 'inside the whale', which for Orwell symbolised

a womb big enough for an adult. ... There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter *what* happens.<sup>65</sup>

The years between 1929 and 1943 would stretch and challenge these attitudes to the Soviet Union. Both Left and Right, anti-Soviets and pro-Soviets, had to employ and develop a number of coping mechanisms in order to remain within their respective whales.

---

<sup>65</sup> 'Inside the Whale', *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 1940, in G. Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 1, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London, 1968), pp. 521-522.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Anti-Soviet responses to the Soviet Union, 1929-1943**

In Britain, between 1929 and 1943, people with anti-Soviet views were confronted with many developments that appeared to contradict their fundamental beliefs about the Soviet Union. Whenever the Soviet economy appeared to be flourishing, or the leaders of the USSR seemed to suggest sensible policies, or the Soviet people fought with particular heroism, British opponents of the USSR were forced to explain this. These opponents came from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Most came from the right of the political spectrum, but a significant number of left-wingers were also hostile to the Soviet Union in this period. In this chapter, I will discuss these people separately, looking first at conservative and right-wing anti-Soviets, and their responses to the challenge of the USSR throughout this period. The left-wing anti-Soviets will follow, with a brief overview of their reactions to Soviet ideas and practices. Finally, I will analyse the coping mechanisms displayed by anti-Soviets in general as they struggled to assimilate the impact of challenging events.

#### **The economic challenge of the Soviet Union to the British Right**

Right-wing critics of the Soviet Union found themselves on the defensive after 1929, when the great capitalist economies of the world plunged into crisis. In Britain, unemployment rose to the heights of three million by 1933. Poverty and misery were clearly visible all over the country, and capitalism, it seemed, was faltering. As champions of capitalism, these anti-Soviets were confronted now with its apparent failures at precisely the same time as the Soviet economy was expanding at a remarkable speed. The Soviet leaders had centralised the economy and instituted a five year plan for large-scale industrialisation. Such measures were anathema to supporters of right-wing economics. However, this effort was paying off, according to left-wing supporters of the USSR, who quoted statistics throughout this period that placed the

Soviet Union among the world's biggest producers.<sup>66</sup> While stagnation dominated the British economy, those who had previously rejected a socialist economy suddenly had to consider the challenge posed by these plans to Conservative or Liberal tenets of economics.

Right-wing anti-Soviets could not deny that Western capitalism was undergoing a time of trial, but at first they insisted that planning did not offer a genuine alternative. For these people, the first Five Year Plan was simply a bad idea, based on unsound economics, incapable of success. It was, at the extreme, a wicked idea, as the *Catholic Times* suggested when it argued that economic planning was incompatible with belief in God.<sup>67</sup> Less conservative voices argued that the Plan was dangerously all-encompassing. If something were to go wrong, it would do so spectacularly.<sup>68</sup> Failures in any one area were immediately interpreted by anti-Soviets as failures overall. Delays or mistakes reported by the Soviet newspapers were taken as proof that economic planning had been discredited. 'Russia's Five-Year Plan Ends in Chaos', reported the vehemently anti-Soviet *Daily Mail* in 1933.<sup>69</sup>

It became increasingly difficult, however, to ignore the progress of industrialisation in the Soviet Union, especially as unemployment rose in Britain. When right-wingers criticised individual failings of the Plan, it seemed like nitpicking. The *Economist* recognised this hypocrisy, pointing out:

The Plan was conceived on heroically optimistic lines, and must be judged by its broad results, not by the exactness of its mechanism. When foreign critics stigmatise the Plan as a 'failure' because it has fallen short of extravagant estimates, Stalin may be forgiven for retorting that such strictures come ill from a world whose recent economic history has been one of almost unrelieved depression.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> For example, 'Soviet Union Beats Capitalist Britain', *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1931, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Catholic Times*, 6 January 1933, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> The *Times*, 25 May 1931, p. 12; and the *Economist*, 2 November 1929, p. 807.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Mail*, 2 January 1933, p. 7; *National Review*, April 1929, p. 229; and the *Times*, 9 July 1929, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> The *Economist*, 28 January 1933, p. 169.

The pro-Soviet Left put forward this point of view vigorously. Left-wing newspapers and writers agreed in portraying the process of industrialisation as an inspiration, whether or not it was perfect. They insisted that the reality of Soviet successes destabilised the very foundations of capitalist society.<sup>71</sup>

Most anti-Soviets came to recognise that some response was necessary, although they did not agree that the distress of the West was more than temporary, or that the system needed to change. Few went as far as the *Economist* when it came to admitting Soviet successes. Instead, most preferred to give sinister or tragic overtones to Soviet productive capability. This can be seen in the campaign against 'dumping' that dominated the British right-wing media's coverage of Soviet industrialisation from late 1930 into 1931. It had been obvious for a long time that the Soviet leaders wanted to disrupt Western nations in any possible way, claimed the *Times*. Now they were doing this by 'dumping' cheap goods on European markets, just as capitalist businesses struggled to recover during the Depression.<sup>72</sup> According to Stanley Baldwin, this was 'economic war'.<sup>73</sup> In this way, Soviet productive growth could be transformed from a success to a threat. A complementary argument was that Soviet industrial success had only been achieved by drastically decreasing Soviet living standards. The citizens of the USSR, anti-Soviets claimed, were living in squalor, receiving none of the products of their labour, which had all been commandeered for the economic war on the West.<sup>74</sup> When news of the devastating famine in the Soviet Union came to the West in early 1933, this was emphasised by anti-Soviet papers as one of the terrible, unavoidable costs of planning.<sup>75</sup>

However, even to admit that the Soviet Union had experienced productive growth was dangerous. With the West crippled by economic depression, such an admission provided ammunition for the militant Left. It was safer to divert attention towards Soviet social,

---

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, 'Soviet's Five-Year Plan Scares Bosses', *Daily Worker*, 20 February 1930, p. 8; M. I. Cole (ed.), *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia*, (London, 1933), pp. 15-34, 73-74; and J. Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (London, 1933), pp. 354-356.

<sup>72</sup> The *Times*, 6 February 1931, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley Baldwin, quoted in the *Times*, 16 May 1931, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> K. Atholl, *The Conscription of a People* (London, 1931), pp. 5-6; and J. B. White, *Red Russia Arms* (London, 1932), p. 136.

<sup>75</sup> *Catholic Times*, 22 September 1933, p. 10.



political and economic failings. These failings were emphasised throughout the first Five Year Plan, as the Right pursued each issue furiously until it wore thin, at that point picking up another one. The first major distraction of this sort engineered by the British Right was the question of religious freedom in the USSR. A campaign against religious persecution in the Soviet Union began in 1929 as a Conservative attack on the Labour Government's decision to restore diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviet Union. Soon, however, it developed into a large movement, passionately and sometimes hysterically supported by many right-wing papers and journals, as well as by churches and individuals. It caused a crisis in church-state relations in the early months of 1930, when the Archbishop of Canterbury called for a national day of prayer for Soviet Christians. Due to Britain's diplomatic obligations to the Soviet Union, Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Prime Minister, banned these prayers from military services. This sparked even more passion among anti-Soviets, who were convinced their Prime Minister was kowtowing to the Kremlin.<sup>76</sup>

The right-wing media was an important participant and provocateur in this campaign. Its reports contributed to a widespread belief that Christians in the USSR were undergoing the most brutal persecution imaginable. While papers like the *Times* confined themselves to reporting the destruction of church bells or the closure of famous churches,<sup>77</sup> others carried stories of atrocities that their correspondents gathered from refugees in Riga. The *Morning Post*, for example, reported that an Orthodox priest was 'first beaten and dragged by the feet through the garden. Then his arms and legs were broken.'<sup>78</sup> Naturally, Christians were horrified by these stories, which ballooned into even more dramatic rumours. In Manchester, at a public meeting held as a protest against Soviet religious persecution, one speaker claimed that Christians in the Soviet Union were being executed for their 'counter-revolutionary' faith.<sup>79</sup> It did not help that Communists attended the public meetings held in support of Soviet Christians, aiming to disrupt them. This only encouraged a battle-like atmosphere, making the Soviet Union's

---

<sup>76</sup> Williams, pp. 103-104; and the *Economist*, 22 February 1930, p. 403 and 8 March 1930, p. 511.

<sup>77</sup> The *Times*, 17 January 1930, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> *Political Quarterly*, April 1930, p. 171, quoted in Williams, p. 109.

<sup>79</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1930, p. 14.

opponents much less likely to listen to the reasoned objections of non-Communist left-wingers, who had been very sceptical about the atrocity stories.<sup>80</sup>

The religious campaign finally died down, but its spirit lived on in some of the issues that followed. The diversionary topic of choice during 1931 was forced labour in the Soviet Union. It was reported that the Plan relied on prisoners, dissidents and kulaks (the richer peasants) to sustain its industries, especially the northern timber trade.<sup>81</sup> By focusing on this, the Right encouraged moral indignation at the use of slavery, and it could raise questions, again, about the Labour Government's decision to trade with the Soviet Union. It was a Conservative MP, the Duchess of Atholl, who wrote an important book on forced labour in the USSR in 1931, under the title *The Conscription of a People*. It reported:

The Plan has been increasingly based on the use of forced labour. ... [There is] widespread exploitation of ... sentenced persons under varying conditions of severity. Millions of peasants have been torn from their homes and sent to heavy compulsory labour under rigorous climatic and other conditions.<sup>82</sup>

This attack on domestic policies of the Soviet Union was also an attack on the Left in Britain itself, as Conservatives attempted to undermine the Labour Government and question its decisions.

The Metro-Vickers affair, of March-July 1933, aroused more heated discussion in Britain, and caused the biggest crisis in Anglo-Soviet relations in this early period. In March, six British engineers working for the Metropolitan-Vickers company in the Soviet Union were arrested for sabotage. The engineers were held in custody, then tried publicly in Moscow, where two made astonishing confessions of their crimes. Four were expelled from the country, and two imprisoned briefly. Right-wing reaction was swift and violent, demanding action. The National Government slapped an embargo on Soviet trade,

---

<sup>80</sup> The *Times*, 14 January 1930, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> For example, the *Times*, 6 February 1931, p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> Atholl, *Conscription*, pp. 6, 178.

leading to a stand-off until July when British and Soviet diplomats managed to bring the crisis to an end.

Anti-Soviets condemned the Soviet Government completely during this scandal, claiming the Communist leaders had committed all kinds of transgressions. A number of high-profile commentators were convinced that the only reason the defendants had confessed was that they had been tortured.<sup>83</sup> Critics such as Winston Churchill demanded an immediate end to trade with the USSR: 'We have traded with cannibals under proper precautions, but that we should give credit and facilities to this foul reptilian regime... surely that should stop here and now.'<sup>84</sup> Besides attacking Britain's trade relationship with the Soviet Union yet again, this issue was also used to divert attention from Soviet successes to something guaranteed to arouse British indignation. The Metro-Vickers affair, declared the *Daily Mail*, was more proof that the Five Year Plan had failed, and that the Soviet Government was trying to cover this up.<sup>85</sup> Comments like this revealed the intense desire of the Right, in all the campaigns against the Soviet Union, to prove that the Five Year Plan did not work.

Although the instigators of these right-wing attacks on the Soviet Union were undoubtedly sincere, their campaigns were tuned to the requirements of domestic rivalries. In particular, Conservatives used each issue to prosecute their case against the Labour Government and its policies, and they were rewarded in 1931 when the Government collapsed. Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald joined with the Conservatives and Liberals to form a National Government, with himself at its head. Then, in October, the Conservatives dominated the general election, leaving Labour with only forty-six MPs. Right-wing attacks on the Soviet Union had played a major part in the Conservative assault on Labour during its brief stint in power.

---

<sup>83</sup> For example, Lord Hailsham in the House of Lords, quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, 12 April 1933, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Winston Churchill, in an article for the *Daily Mail*, 20 April 1933, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Mail*, 10 April 1933, p. 14.

## The early diplomatic challenge of the Soviet Union

After 1933, events in Europe added a new dimension to the challenge of the USSR to anti-Soviet beliefs, complicating the British Right's rejection of all links to the Soviet Union. Hitler rose to power in Germany, and his initial efforts towards repression within the country were, for most people, the cause of horror and anxiety. Of course, a few on the extreme Right went so far as to applaud Hitler's domestic policies, including his resolve to purify Germany of the Jewish influence. Marxism, some claimed, was a direct product of Jewish thought; Marxism destroyed Russia; therefore, Hitler's discrimination against the Jews was perfectly reasonable.<sup>86</sup> This was the message put forward by a number of individuals, and also by the people joining the British fascist movement, which expanded in the early years of the German Reich. For these extremists, this was a worldview that was almost unassailable, so entrenched were they in their bigotry. Their stance would not change.

However, the extremists were a small minority, as most anti-Soviets looked on Nazi ideology and Nazi practice with great disapproval, even if some conservatives had some private sympathy with the feelings that motivated the new German regime. While the repression of Communists was often glossed over or even justified by anti-Communists in Britain, the Nazi attack on other groups in society, such as the Jews, generally disgusted anti-Soviets and pro-Soviets alike. Douglas Jerrold, the editor of the Conservative *English Review*, wrote that the persecution of the Jews had 'irreparably damaged the prestige of the new regime',<sup>87</sup> while the newspapers that initially celebrated the Nazi takeover, such as the *Daily Mail*, found themselves losing readers.<sup>88</sup> The advent of the Nazis challenged the anti-Soviet perception of the Soviet Union as the worst of the worst. Likewise, as fascism became more intimidating, it became more difficult to dismiss the Soviet Union, with its massive economic resources and military potential.

---

<sup>86</sup> J. Wolf, *Some Impressions of Nazi Germany* (London, 1934), pp. 25-26; and *Fascist Quarterly*, January 1935, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> *English Review*, July 1933, quoted in Griffiths, p. 40.

<sup>88</sup> Griffiths, p. 194; Jupp, p. 14; and R. J. Overy, *The Interwar Crisis 1919-1939* (Harlow, 2007), p. 65.

The Soviet leaders took the threat posed by Hitler seriously almost from the beginning. While Stalin attempted to retain Soviet-German links at first, he was soon so concerned by Hitler's clear designs on the East that his foreign policy for Western Europe underwent a dramatic change. Now, the Soviet Union sought out strategic alliances with the democratic Western nations.<sup>89</sup> Maxim Litvinov was sent to represent the USSR at the League of Nations in 1934. In Geneva, Litvinov attempted to call for disarmament, and for increased co-operation between peaceful states against potential aggressors. By 1935, he had successfully negotiated treaties with France and Czechoslovakia. The demands of this foreign policy brought change to the international Communist movement too. Since 1929, the revolutionary 'Class Against Class' line had dominated Communist strategy. Communists had labelled other types of socialists 'social fascists' for their non-revolutionary beliefs, maintaining at all times a confrontational stance. However, this was no longer compatible with the demands of Soviet foreign policy, and the Comintern's line shifted at its Seventh Congress in 1935. Communists were now to work in 'joint action' with other anti-fascists, seeking the broadest possible people's front against fascism.<sup>90</sup> Stalin assured the world that his designs on the West were over. 'The export of revolution is nonsense.'<sup>91</sup>

However, it was too much for most anti-Soviets to accept that Stalin had no desire to foment revolution wherever he could. It went against everything they had assumed about the Soviet Union for over a decade, and they could not believe that Hitler was a greater threat than Stalin. So although the majority of anti-Soviets did not welcome the Nazis, or attempt to justify Nazi violence or repression, they placed Hitler on a scale, balancing him against Stalin. The menace of Communism in the East was a constant, restraining influence on their criticism of Hitler. As Douglas Jerrold continued, with Communism coming directly to his mind, 'the forcible overthrow of Herr Hitler's administration would be a disaster.'<sup>92</sup> In this way, right-wing tolerance of Hitler was predicated on a negative understanding of the Soviet Union and the beliefs of Communism. Many shared a sense of relief that Hitler and the Nazis had come to power

---

<sup>89</sup> M. Myant, '1935—The Turning Point', in Fyrth, pp. 36-37.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 30-33, 41-51.

<sup>91</sup> *The Economist*, 7 March 1936, p. 519.

<sup>92</sup> *English Review*, July 1933, quoted in Griffiths, p. 40.

as a buffer against Communism. As Lord Rothermere wrote, 'the sturdy young Nazis are Europe's guardians against the Communist danger.'<sup>93</sup>

As a result, most anti-Soviets on the Right rejected Litvinov's diplomacy. 'Red Russia' was still the greater threat by far. Her presence at the League of Nations was sinister, and some suspected that her calls for collective security were attempts to create power blocs in Europe, inciting the capitalist nations to war.<sup>94</sup> The *Times* advised the French Government to 'observe all prudence' during negotiations for the Franco-Soviet Pact, as 'suspicion of Soviet motives has not been allayed'.<sup>95</sup> Others misunderstood Litvinov's call for 'indivisible peace', demanding to know why, if the Soviet Union was so determined to maintain peace, she had increased her armed forces to such an extent. Henry Gibbs, the author of a 1936 book about the threat of Bolshevism to the Western world, listed all the improvements made to the Soviet forces, concluding: 'It is with these evidences of pacifism that the Soviet authorities lead their dupes in foreign countries by the nose.'<sup>96</sup> For these writers, an ingrained suspicion that the Soviet Union harboured expansionist ambitions was far greater than any suspicion of Hitler.

Most of the Right also rejected the Soviet interpretation of Hitler, in the beginning. Many believed that *Mein Kampf* was not a serious programme, but the product of youthful excess. Many of Hitler's demands for treaty revision seemed justified. Besides, if Hitler did pose some danger to the East, what concern was it of Britain's? Any diplomatic commitments to the Soviet Union would make an amicable relationship with the profoundly anti-Soviet Hitler even more difficult.<sup>97</sup> Denying pro-Soviet claims of industrial and military improvement in the USSR, anti-Soviets insisted that the Plan had not produced a country that could withstand any military onslaught or contribute anything to Western defences. Further ammunition was given to this argument when eight of the Soviet Union's most senior military experts were executed in the Red Army purges.<sup>98</sup> As a result, many conservative anti-Soviets believed, in the early to mid 1930s,

---

<sup>93</sup> *Daily Mail*, 28 November 1933.

<sup>94</sup> H. Gibbs, *The Spectre of Communism* (London, 1936), pp. 146, 149.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 24 May 1934, p. 12.

<sup>96</sup> Gibbs, pp. 142-144.

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 22 February 1936, p. 11; and *Daily Mail*, 17 September 1934, p. 13.

<sup>98</sup> For example, the *Times*, 22 April 1935, p. 9; and *Daily Mail*, 17 September 1934, p. 13.

that it was best for Britain to avoid commitments in Europe and pursue a policy of friendly neutrality towards Germany.

### **Fascist expansion and anti-Soviet discourse**

Before 1935, there were a small number of people on the Right, such as Lord Vansittart, a Conservative, who had seen some sense in Soviet diplomacy. As anti-Soviet as any other Conservative, Vansittart nevertheless began to argue in 1933 that Hitler was a far greater danger to Britain's interests than the Bolsheviks. This did not make him any less an anti-Soviet, but it placed him in a position that necessitated some revision of anti-Soviet fundamentals, such as the belief that the Soviet Union was incurably expansionist.<sup>99</sup> The Vansittarts of Britain were isolated, for the most part, in the first few years of the Nazi regime. From 1935 and especially 1936, however, it began to seem that they were being confirmed in their predictions, as the fascists of Europe began to expand beyond their borders into other European territories and beyond. The failure of the League of Nations to implement collective security and prevent the Italian expansion into Abyssinia in 1935 was one of the first warning signs, revealing fascism's 'open defiance' of the Western leaders.<sup>100</sup>

The Spanish Civil War came soon after, breaking out in July 1936, when General Franco's rebels rose up against the elected government of the Spanish Republic, with the support of Italy and Germany. For Spanish civilians, the results of fascist intervention were devastating. And for many people abroad, the civil war wrote a new urgency into the story of fascism in Europe. The Spanish government attracted aid from the Soviet government, and thousands of volunteers from Britain and around the world converged on Spain to fight for the Republicans in the anti-fascist cause.<sup>101</sup> The war was a top media priority in Britain, as David Deacon's recent study shows. British newspapers

---

<sup>99</sup> D. M. Lammers, 'Britain, Russia, and the Revival of "Entente Diplomacy": 1934', *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (May 1967), pp. 102-103.

<sup>100</sup> G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, 'The League at the Cross-Roads', *International Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 4 (July-August 1936), pp. 491-494.

<sup>101</sup> D. Cate, *The Left in Europe since 1789* (London, 1971), p. 209.

published thousands of articles and commentaries about it.<sup>102</sup> It was a topic of great debate, fostering so much anxiety and concern that some right-wing anti-Soviets revised their opinions of the Soviet Union drastically.

The debate in Britain polarised around two extremes, both passionately presented. The two sides painted pictures of events in Spain that were mutually unrecognisable, and drew opposite conclusions about their significance. Pro-Soviets and their supporters claimed that the Spanish Civil War was dramatic proof of the danger of fascism to democracy and stability. Spain had enjoyed a democratic government, unthreatening to the outside world. The country had been subjected to an invasion by the armies of the fascist regimes, supporting Franco, who would have failed without this support. So the Civil War was a ghastly example of the aggression of fascism outside its own borders. Guernica, now famous, was only one example of German and Italian brutality.<sup>103</sup> The Left attacked the British policy of neutrality, which in practice ensured that only the Spanish Government was denied military aid. This made a mockery of the idea of 'neutrality'.<sup>104</sup> Many concluded that Britain needed to take action against fascist aggression. Collective security arrangements that included the Soviet Union were required to halt fascist advances and fascist crimes.<sup>105</sup>

For most members of the Right, by contrast, their anti-Sovietism completely overshadowed fascist interference in Spain. After France agreed to the policy of neutrality, the Soviet Union was the only country besides Mexico that sent supplies and military aid to the socialist Spanish Government. For anti-Soviets, this tainted the Republican cause. The forces of Franco became the forces of anti-Sovietism, and the ideological allies of anti-Soviets in Britain. The USSR was *not* the saviour of Spain; instead, the threat came *primarily* from revolutionary Russia's interference in another state's affairs. Franco had merely responded to the Soviet menace. The Right thereby

---

<sup>102</sup> D. Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May Be Too Late* (Edinburgh, 2008), p. 114.

<sup>103</sup> For example, *Daily Worker*, 22 August 1936, p. 4; or H. N. Brailsford in *Reynolds News*, 21 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> 'Review: Searchlight on Spain', *New English Weekly*, 21 July 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 344; and *Reynolds News*, 21 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, *Left Book News*, July 1936, p. 42; and *For Peace and Friendship: Proceedings of the Second National Congress of Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R., London, March 13 and 14* (London, 1937), introduction, pp. 7-8.



reversed the pro-Soviet interpretation of the Spanish Civil War, casting Communism as aggressor and Spanish fascism as victim. As Sir Charles Petrie wrote in the *English Review*:

For some time past Liberals, Socialists, and muddle-headed Conservatives have been assuring us that [the USSR] was a mere bogey. ... Now we know exactly where we are. The Communist plan of campaign was to get control of Spain, and then to use that country as a base for creating disturbances in Africa.<sup>106</sup>

This idea was echoed by a large number of newspapers, of both moderate and extreme inclinations.<sup>107</sup> Other observers did not go so far, but believed all the same that the Soviet Union's defence of the Government in Spain was a gross interference. The Soviet Union had joined the League of Nations and therefore made itself subject to League decisions like the policy of neutrality.<sup>108</sup>

Anti-Soviets had to admit that the fascists were fighting a democratically elected government. However, some coped with this admission by denying that this gave the Spanish Government legitimacy. Both the editors of the *Daily Mail* and the *English Review* argued that the Spanish Government represented only a minority of the population and was able to hold power only through coalition, making it a 'gross [product] of the polls'.<sup>109</sup> This was not a particularly strong defence for a violent military uprising, as the Conservative Party itself had been part of coalition governments. And so these anti-Soviets also diverted attention from fascist sins in the usual way by printing a long list of 'Red atrocity' stories, linked with Soviet involvement in Spain. The *Daily Mail* put the case succinctly:

Moscow wirelessly for the class war—the priest-killing, the havoc, and the slaughter—to begin. ... They armed the scum of the cities and the sweepings of the prisons, creating an atrocious mob which has daily invented new crimes. Not

---

<sup>106</sup> *English Review*, September 1936, p. 248.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, *Catholic Times*, 31 July 1936, p. 1; and the *Times*, 24 November 1938, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> The *Times*, 16 October 1936, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> *English Review*, September 1936, p. 204, quoted in Griffiths, p. 233; and *Daily Mail*, 22 August 1936, p. 8.

content with the wholesale murder of priests, these pitiless barbarians extended to nuns their lust for murder, killing them, outraging them, and burning them alive.<sup>110</sup>

According to the *Daily Mail*, which backed its general claims with detailed stories, a 'Red beauty queen' known as 'Miss Moron' led a horde of barbarians to torture and murder twenty-eight nuns, while shouting the 'Marxist' slogan, 'Children. . . No! Husbands. . . Yes!'<sup>111</sup> These atrocity stories inflamed British anti-Soviet opinion, pushing the more extreme elements closer to a pro-fascist stand. The *Daily Mail* and the *Catholic Times* used these tactics repeatedly, as did individual writers such as Douglas Jerrold of the *English Review*.<sup>112</sup>

Not all anti-Soviets used the same tactics, nor did they always praise the fascist side. The *Times* sparked outrage from Hitler and the German newspapers in 1937 when it reported that the German Luftwaffe was involved in the bombing of Guernica.<sup>113</sup> Admissions of German atrocities were potentially dangerous, as they laid anti-Soviets open to the possible conclusion that fascism as displayed in Spain was a threat. In the main, however, more moderate anti-Soviets coped with these partial admissions by continuing to argue that the Soviet Union was just as bad, if not worse.<sup>114</sup> Suspicion of Soviet intentions in Spain ran high, and overwhelmed any inclination to work with the Soviet Union against German and Italian fascism. 'If Conservatism in Great Britain allows itself to become entangled with the Soviets in an anti-German front in a quarrel which is none of England's, then it will have signed its own death-warrant,' wrote Sir Charles Petrie, a moderate Conservative.<sup>115</sup> Most anti-Soviets therefore continued to reject Litvinov's diplomacy, preferring neutrality in Spain and the use of negotiations to resolve Britain's outstanding issues with Germany. This approach was, of course, fundamental to the policy of appeasement.

---

<sup>110</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 August 1936, p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 August 1936, p. 10; and *Catholic Times*, 28 August 1936, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, *Catholic Times*, 28 August 1936, p. 2; *Daily Mail*, 7 August 1936, pp. 8, 10 and 13 August 1936, p. 10; and Griffiths, pp. 261-262.

<sup>113</sup> Gannon, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> As, indeed, many argued throughout the 1930s. Griffiths, pp. 75-76.

<sup>115</sup> *English Review*, September 1936, p. 249.

All the same, from 1936 on, fascism became increasingly unattractive, even when compared with the Soviet Union. The situation within Germany itself deteriorated, and British right-wingers were shocked to hear of the arrests of German Christians such as Martin Niemöller, or the 'Kristallnacht' violence against the Jews.<sup>116</sup> The rising threat of fascist expansion into Europe and Africa was more worrying for Britain's own position. In 1937, Hitler had denied any intention of making any more territorial demands in Western Europe, but this turned out to be a short-lived promise, when the Nazis took over Austria in March 1938. The British public read in horror as its newspapers reported the Nazis' vicious treatment of Viennese Jews.<sup>117</sup>

As the danger escalated, a number of prominent anti-Soviets decided that they agreed with those who were calling for collective security with other European states, including the Soviet Union, in order to restrict fascism. These anti-Soviets often supported the popular fronts against fascism that had been organised by Left groups such as the Left Book Club. The Duchess of Atholl was one of the Conservative MPs involved. For her, the impact of fascism in Spain necessitated action, for the protection of the British Empire and its ally, France.<sup>118</sup> She was joined by a significant number of other Conservative anti-Soviets—such as Lord Cecil, Duncan Sandys, Wilson Harris of the *Spectator*, Dingle Foot, Sir Arthur Salter, Robert Boothby and Vyvyan Adams. A number of Liberals also joined the movement for collective security, including Sir Archibald Sinclair, Professor Gilbert Murray, Sir Walter Layton and Geoffrey Mander.<sup>119</sup>

With their new counterparts on the Left, these people emphasised the imminent danger of German aggression to the whole European continent and to Britain. Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander said in 1937:

We all know, more or less, who is on the list, but we do not know the priority. We know that the following are on the list: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Danzig,

---

<sup>116</sup> Gannon, pp. 119-120, 226-228.

<sup>117</sup> Gannon, pp. 150, 154; and G. E. R. Gedy, *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London, 1939), pp. 300-313.

<sup>118</sup> K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth, 1938), pp. ix, 314-319.

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, *The Left Book Club*, p. 114; and *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 33ff, 59ff.

Memel, and, of course, the British colonies. There is no doubt about that. So it is quite clear, we are all in it together.<sup>120</sup>

Many of these right-wing observers attended and spoke at 1937's Second Congress of Peace and Friendship with the USSR. They argued that war would come even if Hitler were allowed to take what he wanted from Europe. Instead, the British should combine with France, the Soviet Union, and with other European states to take a stand. Hitler could not continue to expand the Reich unchecked if such a combination stood firmly against his aggression. This involved risks, but if Hitler were allowed to take over most of the European continent without a struggle the risk to Britain and her ally France would be unparalleled.<sup>121</sup> The Munich Agreement negotiated by Chamberlain in 1938 and its capitulation to Hitler's demand for the Sudetenland was a point of real disgust and even despair for many of these voices. They were also concerned at the determined exclusion of the USSR from the Munich negotiations, as if she had nothing to do with them, despite the fact that she was one of Czechoslovakia's firmest allies and a Great Power in Europe.<sup>122</sup>

These right-wingers had certainly not converted to pro-Sovietism. They remained anti-Communist, and were still critical of the domestic policies of the Soviet Union. Working with the Soviet Union or with Communists in Britain did not come naturally to them. At the Congress mentioned above, Vyvyan Adams, the Duchess of Atholl, Dingle Foot and Geoffrey Mander all emphasised this. For the sake of peace they were putting 'their feelings in their pockets', as the Duchess expressed it, but the strength of their opposition to Communism remained.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, some aspects of their worldviews had undergone revision. In the past, for instance, the Duchess of Atholl had believed that the Soviet Union was 'the greatest menace to trade' in the history of the world.<sup>124</sup> Now, however, neither she nor these other right-wingers could believe that Stalin had serious designs on the rest of the world, at least at the present time. Instead,

---

<sup>120</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 27, 63-64, 73-75, 88-89.

<sup>122</sup> Gannon, pp. 107-108, 136-137, 202-204, 209, 226; and Gedye, pp. 300-313.

<sup>123</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 63, 65, 68-69, 74-75, 78.

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1931, p. 11.

they were convinced that he only wanted peace.<sup>125</sup> 'The alleged Communist plot [to control Spain] appears to have existed only in the brains of propagandists,' wrote the Duchess of Atholl. In her opinion, Soviet foreign policy was not driven by a sinister agenda, but was clear-sighted and sensible.<sup>126</sup>

For the most part, these anti-Soviets were making a pragmatic, strategic decision to work with the Soviet Union. Stalin's foreign policy suited them; Soviet interests had aligned with British imperial interests, at least in the short term. However, after coming to this conclusion, these individuals were forced to make some admissions about other Soviet strengths, at least out of sheer pragmatism if not genuine admiration. They praised not only the Soviet Union's foreign policy, but also the manner in which it had been conducted. The Soviet Union had shown constant loyalty to the League of Nations. She was making a concerted effort to show friendship for Britain, and had even helped Britain without receiving anything in return, by 'picking our chestnuts out of the fire' in Spain.<sup>127</sup> These people even began to praise elements of Soviet domestic policy. Dingle Foot said that the new Constitution of 1936 was 'a considerable advance' for the Soviet people, even if it was far from perfect. The Duchess agreed.<sup>128</sup> Geoffrey Mander even described himself as 'greatly impressed' by the 'truly wonderful experiment and adventure on the vast scale' that was happening in the Soviet Union.<sup>129</sup> These were always qualified observations, but they are still significant.

However, these particular anti-Soviets were unusual. Up until the end of 1938, most of the Right continued to reject the call for collective security, preferring Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. This scheme treated Hitler's territorial demands merely as limited demands for revision of the Treaty of Versailles. As it was generally thought that the Treaty had been very harsh, this was seen as reasonable. And as the experience of the Great War had taught the British people to fear war, a policy that favoured negotiation and conciliation rather than threats of military action had an

---

<sup>125</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 62-63, 69, 77.

<sup>126</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 336-337.

<sup>127</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 69, 78; and Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 337.

<sup>128</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 33-34, 41, 73.

<sup>129</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, p. 78.

immediate advantage.<sup>130</sup> For this reason, most of the public and the majority of Conservatives greeted Chamberlain's 'success' at Munich in 1938 with relief, even if many were slightly disturbed by what seemed like a capitulation.<sup>131</sup>

It was not only these tendencies that worked against collective security. The Soviet Union's essential part in an alliance against aggression continued to be one of the largest stumbling blocks in the path of right-wing resistance to Hitler. Friendship with the Soviet Union, even strategic friendship, was simply too horrible to contemplate for some, and they fervently denied that it would ever become a reality. 'In no circumstances will Great Britain join in any conflict in which Moscow is an ally,' insisted Lord Rothermere. 'This is a fact which is crystal clear and should never for a moment be forgotten by our statesmen.' Rothermere continued through 1938, with other editors and newspaper owners, to call for British statesmen to work for friendship with Germany and for non-involvement as much as possible in European affairs.<sup>132</sup> Captain Arthur Howard, who wrote a small book called *The Beast Marks Russia* in 1938, agreed. While the world protested against the Nazi persecution of the Jews, he wrote, it ignored the greater sins of the Soviet government—a 'foul system of organised sadism'—which, he calculated, had killed at least 30 million people since the revolution.<sup>133</sup> For these writers, the Soviet Union's place as the greatest enemy of civilisation was entrenched. It would take extreme villainy on Hitler's part to change this. For now, they rejected the claims of the supporters of collective security.

Although the anti-Soviet newspapers believed that the Treaty of Versailles should be revised, they did not usually approve of Nazi methods. Eventually, as events escalated and the grim realities of Nazi invasions became clearer, this dislike grew and grew. Anti-Soviets now made fewer excuses for the violence and intimidation exhibited by the Nazis and other fascists in Europe.<sup>134</sup> Newspapers such as the *Times* made it very clear that they detested what the Nazis had done, famously calling the Anschluss 'the rape of

---

<sup>130</sup> Gannon, pp. 6-7; and Morris, pp. 87, 98.

<sup>131</sup> Gannon, p. 203; and Morris, pp. 134, 144, 148-149, 151-152.

<sup>132</sup> *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1937, p. 10; and 12 August 1937, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> A. Howard, *The Beast Marks Russia* (London, 1938), pp. 8, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Gannon, pp. 93-98, 184, 229.

Austria'.<sup>135</sup> And while J. L. Garvin of the extremely Conservative *Observer* insisted into 1938 that Britain must not fight its friend Germany in a war that would be on behalf of the Soviet Union, his feelings underwent a dramatic change during the Czech crisis in September 1938. Hitler's criminal methods and insatiable lust for power had become clear; as he wrote, 'the Nazi power [has thrown] off the mask.'<sup>136</sup> The Soviet Union was better placed at this point to push for collective security, even though she was mostly ignored for the time being, remaining an unacceptable ally for the rest of 1938.

### The year 1939

Everything changed in March 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, taking over Bohemia and Moravia. This negated all of Hitler's promises, the last of which had been made only hours before the invasion. The invasion of Czechoslovakia marked a turning point for the anti-Soviet Right, and it was clear now to the British Press that the period of appeasement had reached its close. As the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* put it, 'the "spirit of Munich" is dead and buried, for who can hope to "appease" a boa-constrictor?'<sup>137</sup> Most newspapers agreed that alternative agreements would have to be made, through collective security with other nations. The editor of the *Times*, admitting that his newspaper had considered encirclement of Germany to be unwise in the past, wrote now that 'Germany's own policy, and, above all, her methods, are making encirclement a natural and even an inevitable process.'<sup>138</sup> Though this change had to be made, it was not clear what these arrangements would entail. Would Britain rely on its traditional allies, conscription and increased rearmament, or would the Government overcome its aversion to traditional enemies such as the Soviet Union?

The challenge to anti-Soviet paradigms during this time was intense. By now, many voices were calling for a strong, united front of peace-loving states against Nazi aggression. Such an alliance would make it clear to Hitler that any further aggression would be met with united action. For this to be effective, they repeated, the Soviet

---

<sup>135</sup> The *Times*, 15 March 1938, p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> *Observer*, 25 September 1938, p. 14, quoted in Gannon, pp. 224.

<sup>137</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1939, p. 16, quoted in Gannon, p. 241.

<sup>138</sup> The *Times*, 20 March 1939, p. 17.

Union must be involved. The Soviet Union's armies were strong, her resources almost boundless, and she could not be ignored.<sup>139</sup> While this case had been made for some time by most of the Left and by influential individuals on the Right such as Winston Churchill, support for an alliance with the Soviet Union increased across the political spectrum. The call was given further substance by the proposal of the Soviet Government, after the invasion of Prague, for an immediate conference of 'peace-loving Powers', and subsequent proposals for a three-power Pact between the USSR, Britain and France.<sup>140</sup> From this point the National Government faced great pressure within Parliament and throughout the country to come to terms with the Soviet Union.<sup>141</sup>

The Left vigorously attacked right-wing leaders who had failed to stand up to Hitler. *Fallen Bastions*, an extremely influential book by the journalist G. E. R. Gedye, was published soon after the invasion of Prague. It described the fall of Austria, the events surrounding the Munich agreement, and the effects of this on Czechoslovakia. Gedye was particularly vicious in his denunciation of 'Gauleiter Chamberlain', claiming that the British Prime Minister, with Daladier and Mussolini, was directly responsible for the success of Hitler's aggression so far.<sup>142</sup> Such leaders had lost all credibility in the eyes of the Left. Furthermore, the Left and its anti-fascist allies on the Right did not believe Chamberlain's statement that ideological distaste was not the reason for his failure to form an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>143</sup> The 'snail's pace' of negotiations was intensely frustrating to them.<sup>144</sup> The appeasers, it seemed clear, were reluctant to take appropriate steps to enlist the aid of the Soviet Union.<sup>145</sup> The Labour Party newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, speculated that the Government had not yet given up on the wish of turning Hitler eastward against Bolshevism. The Soviet leaders, an editorial declared, had a perfect right to be suspicious.<sup>146</sup> Such suspicions had some substance, as shown by the Cabinet records and private documents that are now available.<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 16; and Gedye, pp. 387-388.

<sup>140</sup> *Daily Worker*, 8 May 1939, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 12.

<sup>142</sup> Gedye, pp. 313, 381.

<sup>143</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 April 1939, p. 16.

<sup>144</sup> *Daily Herald*, 3 May 1939, p. 10; *Reynolds News*, 2 April 1939, p. 10; and *Manchester Guardian*, 13 April 1939, p. 18.

<sup>145</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 12.

<sup>146</sup> *Daily Herald*, 11 May 1939, p. 10.

<sup>147</sup> Jupp, p. 90; and Keeble, pp. 142-143.



Some extremists still refused to admit that the Soviet Union could be at all useful to Britain. Germany, they argued, did not have to be the enemy. Hitler's expansion was directed eastwards, against Bolshevik Russia, which could only affect Britain positively, said writers like A. P. Laurie.<sup>148</sup> For these voices, usually the most extreme anti-Soviets, nothing could diminish the disgust they had built up over the years for the Soviet regime. Francis Yeats-Brown admitted that appeasement had, 'for the moment, failed'. But a settlement of affairs with Germany was still possible and, indeed, preferable to the other option—collective security with the Soviet Union. According to Yeats-Brown, Stalin's desire at heart, still, was to 'induce the nations of Europe to fight', in order that 'Communism may have a chance to live amongst the ruins of our civilization'.<sup>149</sup> The *Catholic Times* echoed Yeats-Brown, as did some letter-writers to the less extreme publications, none of whom could stomach the sight of Britain's politicians or diplomats fraternising with Soviet diplomats.<sup>150</sup> These anti-Soviets could not be persuaded.

However, by this point, the danger posed by Hitler was clear to most British commentators. Many on the anti-Soviet Right were forced now to accept the need for talks with the Soviet Union, with a view to some kind of arrangement for collective security. Only a few days after German troops marched into Prague, the editor of the *Times*, condemning National Socialism's aggression, wrote that Germany's actions made 'natural allies' of all those threatened by them. The invasion of Czechoslovakia was 'a crime against progress and civilization, and accordingly this country, together with the United States, France, and Soviet Russia, refuses to recognize it.'<sup>151</sup> Soon after this, it was accepted that talks leading to joint action by Britain and the USSR were necessary. This was a point of view picked up very early on by all the major daily newspapers, even some of the most anti-Soviet ones such as the *Daily Mail* or the *Observer*.<sup>152</sup> As a writer for the *Sunday Times* remarked in March, 'it would be the height of folly to disdain the

---

<sup>148</sup> A. P. Laurie, *The Case for Germany: A Study of Modern Germany* (Berlin, 1939), pp. 58, 67.

<sup>149</sup> F. Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle* (London, 1939), pp. 13, 68, 125.

<sup>150</sup> *Catholic Times*, 5 May 1939, p. 3, 14; and 12 May 1939, p. 13; and *National Review*, January 1939, p. 83.

<sup>151</sup> The *Times*, 20 March 1939, p. 17.

<sup>152</sup> Morris, pp. 160-161.

help of Russia because we dislike her domestic policy.'<sup>153</sup> And although Lord Rothermere was plagued with doubts at first, his paper, the *Daily Mail*, also placed high importance on the negotiations with the Soviet Union by April 1939, less than a month after Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia.<sup>154</sup> This shows that the invasion of Prague had a drastic effect on anti-Soviet objections to collective security with the USSR.

Like the right-wing supporters of collective security who had gone before, these newspapers and writers were still anti-Soviet. There were still many limitations to their support of an alliance with the Soviet Union. They made it clear that they were making no admissions that the Left had been right all along; for example, they did not agree that appeasement had been the wrong policy from the start, even if it was now no longer feasible.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, when left-wingers such as G. E. R. Gedye tried to get away with too much, the Right immediately reacted. After publishing his extreme criticisms of Chamberlain, Gedye lost his job as correspondent for the Conservative *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>156</sup> Anti-Soviets also limited their praise of the Soviet Union as an ally. She was only acceptable because of her size, while her armed forces, they believed, were of a very low standard.<sup>157</sup> Those who supported the negotiations for an alliance made it clear that they did so only for reasons of expediency, and not because they trusted the devious Bolsheviks. All the same, the editor of the *National Review* admitted that despite 'the drawbacks of a Russian alliance ... we have little choice and can neglect no chance of support, however slender.'<sup>158</sup>

Nevertheless, anti-Soviets began to revise some traditional anti-Soviet assumptions, especially as the year went on. While in the past the majority of anti-Soviets had denied Soviet achievements or tried to divert attention from them, the beginnings of a partial acknowledgement became evident. Anti-Soviets gave praise grudgingly, where it seemed due, and even revised earlier beliefs. Writers of the *National Review* decided that 'there is no greater myth than the idea, believed in some quarters, that Herr Hitler

---

<sup>153</sup> *Sunday Times*, 26 March 1939, p. 18, quoted in Gannon, p. 260.

<sup>154</sup> *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1939, p. 10; and 15 April 1939, p. 11.

<sup>155</sup> *The Times*, 16 March 1939, p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> Gannon, p. 47.

<sup>157</sup> *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1939, p. 10; and *National Review*, May 1939, p. 588.

<sup>158</sup> *National Review*, May 1939, p. 557.

is standing between Western Europe and Bolshevism', a point of view that had been accepted by their predecessors at the *English Review*.<sup>159</sup> The same writers, in April, admitted some respect for Stalin's leadership, comparing him favourably to Hitler. 'There is no ranting, no roaring, when Stalin talks. There are no gestures.' Stalin was in touch with reality, and instead of making ugly threats, his warnings were calm, made from a position of strength. Not all totalitarians were the same, then.<sup>160</sup> One of the more startling changes, however, was the *Daily Mail's* perspective. Where previously the notoriously anti-Soviet Lord Rothermere had been convinced of the Soviet leaders' dastardly intentions, he began to correct statements published in his newspaper which previously he would have applauded. For example, after a letter from a member of the public, who was critical of any negotiations with the devious Soviet leaders, the editor made this statement: 'The Marxist theory of World Revolution ... is held by the followers of Trotsky, but has been repudiated by Stalin and the present rulers of Soviet Russia.'<sup>161</sup> While these examples of change may seem rather tame, they were so different in comparison to what went before that they mark a significant shift in thinking among the anti-Soviet Right.

It is clear from the newspapers and other public discourse at the time that the National Government's hesitancy in dealing with the Soviet Union frustrated many Conservatives in Parliament and their supporters around the country. A number of Conservative and Liberal MPs—such as Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill, Robert Boothby and David Lloyd George—challenged the Prime Minister on the speed of the negotiations, calling for an immediate alliance.<sup>162</sup> Meanwhile, major Conservative newspapers and journals, such as the *Daily Telegraph*, developed a distinctly critical tone.<sup>163</sup> The *National Review* also grew steadily more disenchanted. It was 'sickening', one columnist wrote, to see the way the Government had left its people unprepared for the approaching war. 'The people deserved better leadership.' Later, in June, the editor was particularly critical of highly-placed individuals whose 'defeatist' attitudes were holding up negotiations with

---

<sup>159</sup> This journal absorbed the *English Review* in 1937. *National Review*, January 1939, p. 4; and *English Review*, July 1933, quoted in Griffiths, p. 40.

<sup>160</sup> *National Review*, April 1939, pp. 423-424.

<sup>161</sup> *Daily Mail*, 25 March 1939, p. 10.

<sup>162</sup> Keeble, p. 147; *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 16; and *Daily Mail*, 4 April 1939, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Keeble, pp. 241-242.

the Soviet leaders. This enabled voices in Berlin to assert that Chamberlain still wanted an agreement with the Nazis. 'We hope it can be truthfully denied, for if the Secretariat at 10, Downing Street likes eating dirt, the British as a whole do not care for this diet.' As this feeling of dissatisfaction grew, the Soviet Union looked better and better. The USSR and its leaders did not play games, said the editor of the *National Review*; instead, they responsibly and sincerely worked for peace and security.<sup>164</sup>

Some historians, looking at the reaction of the newspapers or public figures, have argued that there was no solid consensus in Britain for an alliance with the USSR in 1939. Richard Cockett, for example, suggests that the right-wing media only began to consider an alliance as late as June or July 1939, an assertion which does not tally with the comments of these newspapers in March or April, immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>165</sup> It is true that some of the more extreme anti-Soviet groups and individuals, such as the Catholic mouthpieces quoted above, continued to reject such a repugnant idea. This was backed up by some level of activity among the wider public, as shown by one *Catholic Times* report of an anti-Soviet public meeting in May.<sup>166</sup> Benny Morris writes:

Life-long anti-Bolsheviks and Conservative and Catholic appeasers found it well-nigh impossible to stomach the prospect of an Anglo-Soviet alliance. ... The prospect of fighting in alliance with 'murderous Reds' remained abhorrent and forbidding.<sup>167</sup>

While it is true that the shift was painful, this argument treats Conservatives and Catholics and other anti-Soviets as a unified group. They were not. A shift had taken place for most mainstream anti-Soviet voices in Britain, who called for an alliance at this point. While these people continued to be anti-Bolshevik, the challenge to their former assumptions about the Soviet Union was now so great that they responded with more

---

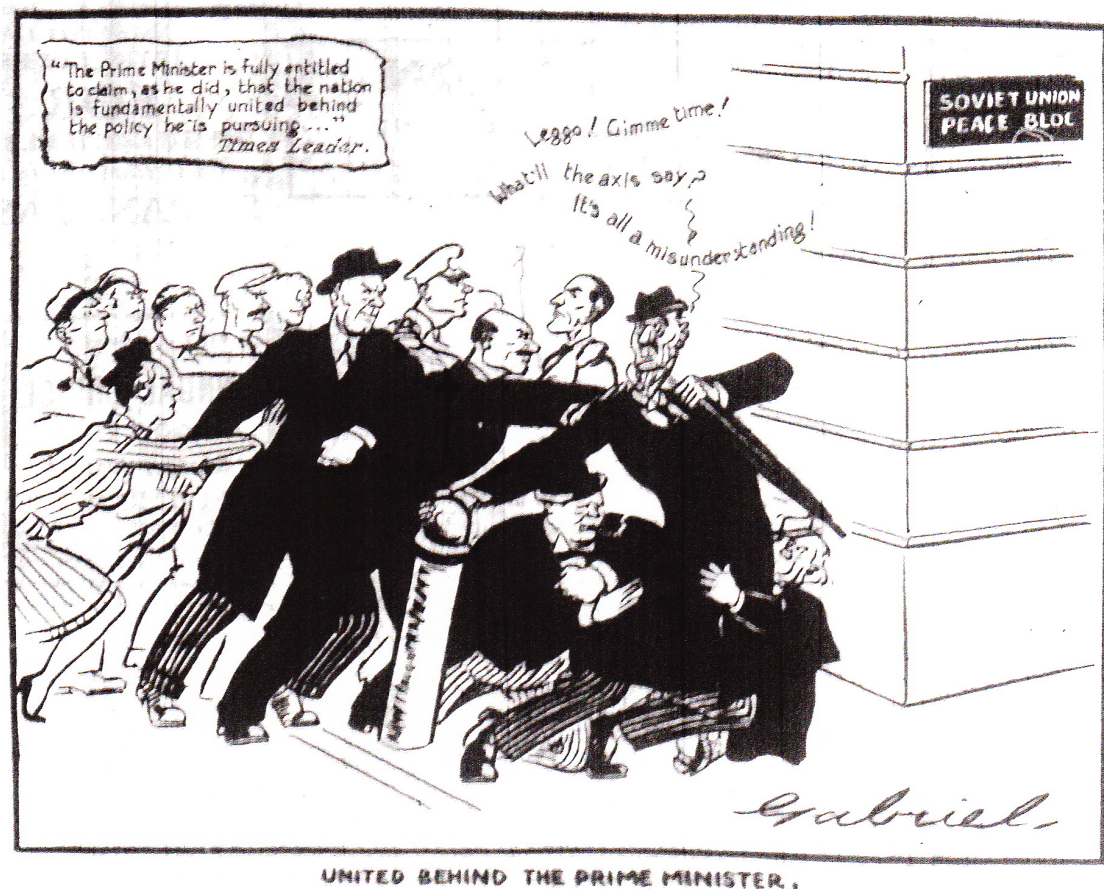
<sup>164</sup> *National Review*, May 1939, p. 587; and June 1939, pp. 702-703.

<sup>165</sup> R. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (New York, 1989), pp. 115-116.

<sup>166</sup> *Catholic Times*, 19 May 1939, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> Morris, p. 165.

flexibility than ever before, admitting Soviet strengths and Britain's need for a form of friendship with the USSR.<sup>168</sup>



A *Daily Worker* cartoon of May 1939, satirising the *Times*' assertion that the nation was 'united behind the Prime Minister'.<sup>169</sup>

It also seems that, in general, public opinion supported the principle of a peace front against aggression including the USSR. The Left, in its numerous organs, and other supporters insisted that Chamberlain had been forced to negotiate with the Soviets by the united will of the nation against him.<sup>170</sup> Although the *Times* disagreed—there was, the editor argued, not 'the smallest reason to doubt that the nation is in fact united behind the Prime Minister'—it too believed that 'the pressure of events' had forced the

<sup>168</sup> R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993), pp. 218-219.

<sup>169</sup> *Daily Worker*, 13 May 1939, p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> *Left News*, July 1939, p. 1327; *Reynolds News*, 2 April 1939, p. 10; and *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 12.

Government to negotiate.<sup>171</sup> Disagreement between pro-Soviets and anti-Soviets in the public sphere, therefore, was not over the existence of the shift itself, but its causes.

There are obvious difficulties in finding out what the general populace thought. The *Left News* spoke of combatting 'apathy' among the public, which could have been widespread.<sup>172</sup> Some clues, however, can be found in the Mass Observation Archive's directives, one of which questioned a large number of people, in June 1939, on the 'races' with which they would prefer to collaborate, and the world leaders they most admired. The average response was to place 'Russia' and 'Stalin' between third and fourth out of ten options,<sup>173</sup> and those who responded with extra comments shed further light. Some were not particularly interested, and a few were opposed to any collaboration with the Soviet Union whatsoever. However, the majority of people who commented made it clear that, although they were not usually drawn to collaboration with Russia, this had become a more natural alignment for reasons of strategy or 'the future of the world'.<sup>174</sup> This indicated that the prevailing feeling among the British media had either filtered down to these respondents, developed at the same time in response to world events, or had existed among them already.

As the year went on, hopes of preventing war increasingly rested on achieving an Anglo-Soviet alliance. This can be seen in the public discourse, in the headlines that constantly announced all steps towards such an alliance, in the choice of news stories, and in the content of the letters to the editor and the editorial comments. The *Daily Mail*, for example, repeated through April, May and June this assertion: 'Anglo-Russian Pact in Sight', 'Full Agreement with Russia Soon', 'Russia will come in'. The relief expressed in these articles reflects the extent to which this traditionally anti-Soviet newspaper had

---

<sup>171</sup> *Times*, 13 April 1939, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> *Left News*, July 1939, p. 1327.

<sup>173</sup> The options given to respondents were (a) French, Italian, Scandinavian, Jewish, American, Irish, Asiatic, Polish, Negro and Russian; and (b) Daladier, Mussolini, Chamberlain, Stalin, Roosevelt, Beck, Chiang-kai-shek, Hitler, De Valera and Goering.

<sup>174</sup> Mass Observation Archive (MOA), (in particular) DR 1019, DR 1034, DR 1039, DR 1204, DR 1206, DR 1230, DR 1234, DR 1244, DR 1245, reply to June 1939 Directive.

come to rely on the hope of collaboration with the Soviet Union.<sup>175</sup> This point of view was displayed in the other conservative journals and newspapers too.<sup>176</sup>

The Nazi-Soviet Pact shattered these hopes. It was soon followed by the Nazi invasion of Poland from the west, the British declaration of war, the Soviet invasion of Poland from the east on 18 September, and the subsequent partition of the country between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The astonishment attending Stalin's 'volte-face' left many in a state of numb confusion, unable to understand the significance of what had just occurred. This confusion was perhaps most dramatically felt on the pro-Soviet Left, but it was echoed among anti-Soviets too, indicating the extent of their shift towards a positive view of Soviet diplomacy. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, thought such a pact was impossible, and speculated that, even if it were true, the Soviet leaders were still committed to an Anglo-Soviet friendship.<sup>177</sup> Even the *Daily Mail* initially thought that there was 'nothing in all this that need cause alarm', reminding readers of the Soviet Union's hatred for fascism.<sup>178</sup>

However, condemnation, whether immediate or eventual, came from most conservatives. Those who had always been opposed to an alliance preened themselves. One letter-writer congratulated the *Catholic Times*: 'I think that The Catholic Times can justly pride itself on the sane and far-sighted advice it has given in this matter.'<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, those who had campaigned for an alliance were rebuked. Lord Esher wrote to the *New Statesman and Nation*, 'however unwise Mr Chamberlain may have been to disbelieve in the treachery of Hitler, it is more than balanced by your own complete failure to anticipate the treachery of Stalin.'<sup>180</sup> Meanwhile, those who had been brought to support an Anglo-Soviet alliance were angry at having allowed themselves to be swayed by pro-Soviet promises that the moral thrust of Soviet ideology was towards peace. They condemned the Soviet Union in its own terms. 'The line along which Poland has been partitioned is the line of demarcation between the two imperialisms,' declared

---

<sup>175</sup> *Daily Mail*, 17 April 1939, p. 13, and 25 May 1939, pp. 7, 10.

<sup>176</sup> For example, *National Review*, July 1939, p. 8.

<sup>177</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 1939, p. 12, quoted in Gannon (1971), p. 281.

<sup>178</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 August 1939, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>179</sup> *Catholic Times*, 25 August 1939, p. 10.

<sup>180</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 September 1939, p. 427.

the *National Review*.<sup>181</sup> Sympathy for Poland, attacked from both sides, was widespread on the streets, in the papers, and in Parliament.<sup>182</sup>

The Soviet invasion of Finland, following soon after, shocked British society as a whole, and anti-Soviets were as critical as any. The invasion came after a number of talks with the Finns in which the Soviet leaders had insisted on an exchange of territory. The Finns had seemed anxious to be co-operative as far as they were able, but Soviet troops still invaded on 30 November. This was instantly condemned by many on both the Left and the Right. 'Finland, like Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, and Poland, is the victim of a murderous assault,' wrote Lord Rothermere in the *Daily Mail*. 'Soviet Russia, who stabbed Poland in the back, adds to her criminal record.'<sup>183</sup> Influential voices began to call for the expansion or redirection of the war, if Finland's struggle lasted. The Conservative MP Cyril Culverwell, for example, suggested publicly that Hitler was no longer the greatest threat.<sup>184</sup> As the Soviet war with Finland ended and events progressed into 1940, however, the focus was drawn inevitably to developments closer to home. The fall of most of Northwest Europe, including France, followed closely by the Battle of Britain, overshadowed the Soviet Union's actions for the time being and Britain's task fell firmly to fighting Hitler.

### **The wartime alliance**

On 22 June 1941, German troops invaded the Soviet Union in the early morning, by land and air. The change in Soviet-British relations was sudden and spectacular. Winston Churchill responded almost immediately with one of his most memorable speeches, promising that Britain would help the USSR in any way she could. An anti-Soviet of long standing, he did not regret one word of criticism. However, this had become irrelevant. Because Britain and the Soviet Union now had a common enemy, 'the past, with all its crimes, its follies, and its tragedies, flashes away.'<sup>185</sup> Churchill's attitude was echoed

---

<sup>181</sup> *National Review*, December 1939, p. 677.

<sup>182</sup> *Daily Herald*, 19 September 1939, p. 1; and *Manchester Guardian*, 19 September 1939, p. 6.

<sup>183</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939, p. 6.

<sup>184</sup> Cyril Culverwell, quoted in D. N. Pritt, *Must the War Spread?* (Harmondsworth, 1940), p. 185.

<sup>185</sup> *The Times*, 23 June 1941, p. 4; and 14 July 1941, p. 5.



among his people, whose response to the invasion of the Soviet Union was one of determined goodwill to the hard-pressed Soviet people. 'One touch of Hitler makes the whole world kin,' said a writer for the *Times*, explaining the new attitude.<sup>186</sup> Sympathy was widespread, and it was expressed in many different ways. One story that made the rounds, for instance, was that Lord Davidson, the manager of the Conservative Party, had replaced the pink rose he normally wore in his buttonhole with a red one.<sup>187</sup>

There were limitations to this early support for the USSR's war effort. Although many conservative anti-Soviets recognised that Hitler was the greater threat, they made it clear that they had not forgotten the past. 'Nemesis is threatened for the wily Stalin,' said the editor of the *Daily Mail*. 'He is paying the penalty now for a policy of brutal cynicism and a series of shattering political blunders.'<sup>188</sup> While most people did not *want* Hitler to conquer the Soviet Union, anti-Soviets in a number of different quarters still expected his armies to 'run through [the Russians] like butter'.<sup>189</sup> Most people accepted the need for an alliance with the Soviet Union, but only with reluctance. This reluctance was palpable, for instance, in the BBC's decision not to include the Internationale in its regular broadcast of Allied national anthems. The *Evening Standard's* suggestion that its replacement should be the popular song 'You Made Me Love You; I Didn't Want To Do It' was an apt caricature of these feelings.<sup>190</sup>

However, despite these feelings, most people heeded Churchill's warnings against recriminations.<sup>191</sup> These would only play into the hands of Hitler, and Britain would not be manipulated, insisted most anti-Soviets. After listing Stalin's crimes, the *Daily Mail* editorial went on: 'With Mr Churchill, the British Empire ... will now say: "The past is past." The one thing that matters to-day is that we face a common enemy.'<sup>192</sup> Those who reminded the public of Soviet crimes were censured. Letter-writers recommended that they 'bury the hatchet' with the Communists and the Soviet leaders as quickly as

---

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in *Reynolds News*, 29 June 1941, p. 2.

<sup>187</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 28 June 1941, p. 646.

<sup>188</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 June 1941, p. 2.

<sup>189</sup> MOA: TC 25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Three Overheards on Russia. Paddington. 23/7/41. See also *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 July 1941, p. 53.

<sup>190</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 July 1941, pp. 51, 53.

<sup>191</sup> *The Times*, 23 June 1941, p. 4.

<sup>192</sup> *Daily Mail*, 23 June 41, p. 2.

possible. Recriminations could 'only retard the war effort'.<sup>193</sup> Anti-Soviets had not forgotten, nor had they forgiven. They did make a conscious effort to move on, though, extending a sincere welcome to the Soviet Union as an ally, and offering sympathy for her people, if not for her leaders.

All the same, the Right became increasingly challenged in its anti-Sovietism, as the Soviet war effort became ever more heroic. The public's sympathy for the USSR grew and grew, and prominent anti-Soviets made increasingly clear admissions of the achievements of the Soviet Union. This is evident in the publications of both the Left and the Right, and in the records of Mass-Observation. Because of the diversion of Nazi resources into the USSR, Britain was experiencing a respite from the Luftwaffe's bombs, whereas in the Soviet Union the people's struggle against the Nazi invasion involved huge losses and intense hardship. Their war effort was undeniably total. Sympathy with their suffering grew, while admiration of the people blossomed. Their 'mettle', it was thought, had to be 'exceptionally high'.<sup>194</sup> Even the *Catholic Times*, which had rejected an alliance between the two countries, even in 1941, began to admit, despite its dislike of the Soviet regime, that it was the Soviet people who were 'bearing the physical brunt of the war'.<sup>195</sup>

The Red Army became progressively more successful at holding back the German armies. Their great victories on the Eastern Front at key points like Stalingrad drew passionate admiration and gratitude from the British public.<sup>196</sup> The Red Army's 'dauntless spirit', 'prodigious valour', 'stubborn fortitude' and 'physical endurance' were praised by a wide range of people and in many different forums. Its twenty-fifth anniversary was celebrated throughout the country.<sup>197</sup> As Stalin was a marshal of the Red Army, his profile rose, and he became very much more popular in Britain both as a military and a political leader. 'The man speaks—and acts—like a leader,' wrote the editor of the *National Review*. 'He has kept his people together in months of exceptional

---

<sup>193</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 July 1941, p. 5. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1941, p. 6 and 30 June 1941, p. 4.

<sup>194</sup> *The Times*, 7 October 1941, p. 4 and 1 May 1932, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> *Catholic Times*, 21 August 1942, p. 7.

<sup>196</sup> *National Review*, December 1942, p. 456 and March 1943, p. 175.

<sup>197</sup> *The Times*, 2 January 1942, p. 5, 22 February 1943, p. 2 and 21 October 1942, p. 5; R. P. Dutt, *25 Years* (London, 1942); and *National Review*, November 1942, p. 370.

difficulty.<sup>198</sup> In this way Stalin appealed to much of the British public as well. In a Mass-Observation survey, one respondent said, 'wish Stalin could be our P.M. for a while.'<sup>199</sup> 'While giving Churchill his due,' said another man on the street, 'he is not a Stalin.'<sup>200</sup>

This gratitude permeated British feelings towards the Soviet Union, revealing itself in Britain's cultural and public life in completely new ways. Hundreds of thousands of people sent or signed greetings to groups in the Soviet Union or to Stalin, congratulating them on their war effort and assuring the Soviet people of their intention to do all they could to help.<sup>201</sup> The *Daily Herald* advised readers on how to make a 'lovely Russian hat', while the Women's Gas Council published pamphlets on Russian cooking.<sup>202</sup> Battersea Park on a Bank Holiday featured an Anglo-Soviet Fair with Punch and Judy, a baby show, and the Internationale.<sup>203</sup> A hammer and sickle flew over Selfridge's.<sup>204</sup> Twelve-year-old boys could be found raffling their favourite toys in order to give money to the Help for Russia Fund.<sup>205</sup> While friendship was also extended to America and the other allies, in Orwell's opinion the Soviet Union was probably an unofficial favourite.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> *National Review*, December 1941, p. 586. See also *The Times*, 22 December 1941, p. 2.

<sup>199</sup> MOA: DR 1016, reply to January 1942 directive.

<sup>200</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Indirect (Russia), Streatham and Marylebone, 21.11.42.

<sup>201</sup> *The Times*, 10 March 1942, p. 4. See also the *Times*, 22 December 1941, p. 2.

<sup>202</sup> *Daily Herald*, 30 November 1942, p. 2; and MOA: T1 Housing 1938-1948, 8/J, Exhibition pamphlets 1942.

<sup>203</sup> *Daily Herald*, 5 August 1941, p. 2.

<sup>204</sup> 'London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, March-April 1942, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 177.

<sup>205</sup> *Daily Herald*, 13 January 1942, p. 3.

<sup>206</sup> 'The British Crisis: London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, July-August 1942, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 214.



A Russian girl sniper visits London.<sup>207</sup>

At the height of pro-Soviet fervour in Britain, Conservatives and other traditional anti-Soviets made entirely new kinds of admissions about the Soviet Union. It was very rare now to come across a right-wing newspaper, journal or individual who did not admit that the Soviet Union's determined struggle against Hitler posed a challenge to anti-Sovietism in Britain. It seemed this could not be denied. Instead, the Right, especially in Conservative publications such as the *Times* or the *National Review*, made admissions about the Soviet system that were difficult to reconcile with its underlying political views.

Many on the traditionally anti-Soviet Right could not help but be impressed by the leadership that made the Soviet Union's total war effort possible. It seemed that the leadership of Stalin and his generals was much more efficient than the Tsarist leadership during the First World War. The provision of supplies for the Red Army was well-organised, and the Soviet war offices seemed devoid of corruption, unlike the Tsar's war

---

<sup>207</sup> Keeble, inset.

offices. British commentators were impressed by the Soviet people's trust in their leaders. 'The Russian soldier will not be sold from behind, as he was in the last war. He knows that,' said Negley Farson in the *Daily Mail*.<sup>208</sup> The Soviet leaders demanded a 'superlative' effort from the people. This was because they were truly 'resolute' in their determination to rid the world of the Nazi scourge—an attitude that commanded respect.<sup>209</sup> Although many anti-Soviets diverted attention from the Communism of the Soviet Union by focusing on 'the great Russian people' or 'Russian patriotism',<sup>210</sup> other anti-Soviets admitted that the Soviet people seemed to be fighting for their system as well. The socialist system and their leaders had provided them with the means to fight and 'a faith to fight for'. They accepted the sacrifices asked of them because the system was truly theirs.<sup>211</sup>

Even though the Soviet leaders were tough, demanding much of their people, it seemed to right-wing observers that the system was becoming more liberal, as the leaders listened carefully to their people, granting them more freedoms. It appeared that tolerance was blossoming during the war in areas such as religion, while suspicion of the outside world was dying down.<sup>212</sup> This seemed to be a sign, commentators on the Right admitted, that the Soviet leaders were behaving increasingly wisely, despite their socialism. Perhaps, they continued, they had even made mistakes in the past in their interpretation of Soviet actions and in their treatment of the USSR. Perhaps the depth of the suspicion that had been held against the Soviet Union had been a mistake. 'I feel we should never have had this prejudice against Russia,' said one right-wing observer on the street. Another continued with the opinion that the 'bias' entrenched in the National Government against the USSR had been 'a great pity', and if Britain had come to terms with her earlier, the war would probably not have been necessary.<sup>213</sup> The right-wing press echoed this feeling—the Soviet Union had surprised everyone, and conservative

---

<sup>208</sup> *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1941, p. 2; and *Times*, 14 July 1941, p. 5.

<sup>209</sup> *National Review*, October 1941, p. 398; and the *Times*, 21 October 1942, p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> For example, the *Times*, 2 January 1942, p. 5; and *National Review*, November 1941, p. 471.

<sup>211</sup> 'Russia At Work On May Day: Holiday Willingly Sacrificed', the *Times*, 1 May 1942, p. 3; and 21 October 1942, p. 5; *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1941, p. 2; and Dutt, *25 Years*, p. 2.

<sup>212</sup> The *Times*, 22 June 1943, p. 5; and 7 September 1943, p. 3; and *Catholic Times*, 18 June 1943, p. 6.

<sup>213</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia Q.Q. Paddington, L.B., 20.11.42 and Indirect (Russia), Streatham and Marylebone, 21.11.42.

Britain had quite possibly been unfair in its estimation of the Soviet state.<sup>214</sup> It was clear that the right-wing interpretation of the Soviet Union's past needed to be revised.

Individual areas of Soviet life were revisited. The Five Year Plans, for example, were found to have been much more successful than the Right had previously admitted, and the motivation driving them was 'the most spiritual thing that has happened in Europe for over a century', according to a Catholic writer in the *National Review*. Even the *Catholic Times* admitted that the Communists had been right to criticise certain forms of capitalism.<sup>215</sup> The purges had disposed of those elements with a tendency towards corruption, and therefore prepared the USSR for war.<sup>216</sup> Even the Soviet invasions of Poland and Finland became explicable in the light of the Nazi threat, while the Poles and Finns were encouraged to put aside their grievances and resist the 'wiles' of Hitler and Goebbels.<sup>217</sup> In general, these voices came to the conclusion that the threat of the USSR to the Western world had been greatly exaggerated. In fact, the Soviet leaders had long ago abandoned their aim of world revolution—an opinion consolidated when the Comintern was dissolved in May 1943, to the satisfaction of many.<sup>218</sup> These people hoped that the suspicion held against the Soviet Union had not caused permanent damage. As the *Times* put it:

In view of the coolness with which she was once viewed it would not be unreasonable if the energy and idealism of Soviet Russia had been directed exclusively to the colossal problems created by the war within her own frontiers. ... Such a policy would have caused [a great loss to Europe].

---

<sup>214</sup> 'A nation in ferment', *Daily Mail*, 21 November 1942, p. 2; and the *Times*, 22 February 1943, p. 2 and 22 June 1943, p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> *National Review*, November 1941, p. 521; the *Times*, 1 May 1942, p. 3; and *Catholic Times*, 28 May 1943, p. 7.

<sup>216</sup> *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1941, p. 2.

<sup>217</sup> The *Times*, 22 February 1943, p. 2; and 14 July 1942, p. 5; and *National Review*, October 1941, p. 374.

<sup>218</sup> Keeble, p. 171; and *Catholic Times*, 28 May 1943, p. 7.

Therefore, many Conservatives now believed that anti-Bolshevik suspicion in Britain had been dangerous, making the Soviet leaders believe Britain could not be trusted, and affecting Europe's long-term security.<sup>219</sup>

Many right-wingers were now convinced that Britain needed the help of the Soviet Union, both in the present and the future. Hopes were high that the mutual suspicion that had marked the past would not resurface when the war was over. The Archbishop of Canterbury and Anthony Eden both agreed publicly that it was important that the current sense of friendship marking Anglo-Soviet relations should continue for as long as possible.<sup>220</sup> It was clear that strong relations were vital now, in the fight against fascism.<sup>221</sup> But some right-wingers also accepted the Left's argument that Soviet co-operation was absolutely necessary in the post-war settlement. Looking back to the Treaty of Versailles, which had seemingly produced all the present troubles, newspapers such as the *Times* admitted early on that it was 'amply clear that a stable settlement of the affairs of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe cannot be achieved without Russian participation'.<sup>222</sup> This was vital to British security, but it was also what the Soviet Union had earned. The *Times* also acknowledged that the Soviet leaders deserved to have a say in the political structures governing the countries that surrounded her. These were very significant statements, coming from commentators who hated socialism.<sup>223</sup>

As the Soviet Union now presented so much more of a challenge to fundamental anti-Soviet beliefs, the challenge of left-wing politics heightened also. The Left used every opportunity now to hammer home its demands for a socialist system, making the most of the Soviet Union's popularity. Even relatively apolitical issues such as calls for a second front were taken up by the Left to use as political capital. The Soviet struggle, it seemed clear, had granted Britain a lull in her own battle for survival.<sup>224</sup> The British war effort seemed comparatively relaxed, and this bred in many observers a strong sense of

---

<sup>219</sup> The *Times*, 22 June 1943, p. 5 and 14 July 1942, p. 5.

<sup>220</sup> Anthony Eden, quoted in the *Times*, 22 November 1941, p.2 and 22 February 1942, p.2; and the Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 12 September 1942, p. 2.

<sup>221</sup> The *Times*, 21 October 1942, p. 5; and *Catholic Times*, 11 September 1942, p. 7.

<sup>222</sup> The *Times*, 14 July 1941, p. 5.

<sup>223</sup> The *Times*, 12 February 1942, p. 5.

<sup>224</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia Q.Q. Paddington, L.B., 20.11.42 and Indirect (Russia), Streatham and Marylebone, 21.11.42.

shame that Britain could not do more to help.<sup>225</sup> Calls for the government to open a second front against Germany increased in number and force as the war went on. This was a by-product of the sympathy for the Soviet people that saturated British society, and less of a Left-versus-Right issue than many Soviet-related debates. However, in late 1942, some on the Left began to argue that the only reason a second front had not been opened was that the incorrigibly anti-Soviet British leaders were still secretly hoping to avoid fighting fascism.<sup>226</sup> While this feeling died down after the invasion of Normandy in mid-1943,<sup>227</sup> it is indicative of the Left's attempts to politicise sympathy for the Soviet Union in these years.

The pro-Soviet Left used this support of the Soviet Union to call for a number of policies that were unacceptable to right-wing politicians and their supporters. Firstly, most of the Left thought that the Soviet Union and Britain should continue in a close political partnership even after the post-war settlement. This was the argument of writers like G. D. H. Cole, in his 1941 book, *Europe, Russia and the Future*.<sup>228</sup> Between 1939 and 1941, many within Labour had discussed the possibility of a federation of European states,<sup>229</sup> and the USSR's presence among the Allies gave this idea further impetus. Secondly, the Left insisted that the solution for all the problems of Britain and Europe was socialism. Capitalism, it was argued, had been proven defunct. 'For the Europe of the future, Capitalism means Fascism, because Fascism is the only power capable of keeping capitalism alive,' wrote Cole.<sup>230</sup> This claim was echoed in most left-wing publications. The war could only be won through socialism, and the peace could only be maintained through socialism.<sup>231</sup> As an idea, it received more support than ever before, probably because of the example of the Soviet Union, and left-wing politicians did not hesitate to use Soviet popularity to demand change.<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> *National Review*, September 1942, p. 189; and *Daily Herald*, 7 March 1942, p. 2.

<sup>226</sup> See, for example, *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 August 1942, p. 126; and 8 August 1942, p. 88-89.

<sup>227</sup> Jones, pp. 81-84.

<sup>228</sup> *Left News*, August 1941, p. 1818. See also *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 July 1941, p. 4; Dutt, 25 Years, pp. 7-8; and B. Pares, *Russia* (Harmondsworth, 1942), pp. 249-50.

<sup>229</sup> Corthorn and Davis, pp. 86-109.

<sup>230</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *Europe, Russia, and the Future* (London, 1941), p. 10.

<sup>231</sup> V. Gollancz, *Russia and Ourselves* (London, 1941), p. 72.

<sup>232</sup> Jones, pp. 86-87.



For the Right, these were drastic challenges. For the first time, it seemed to right-wingers that their anti-socialism could not be fully sustained by the example of the USSR, which was performing well on their own admission. The Soviet Union's popularity also made it difficult for them to critique its system, or to speak quite so outspokenly about disagreements with its leaders.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, Bill Jones describes the Soviet Union's image by the end of 1943 as 'sacrosanct'.<sup>234</sup> It came across as unsympathetic to the Soviet people to criticise the USSR, especially when anti-Soviet voices themselves recognised that their debt to the Soviet Union was great. This was worrying for anti-socialists. Churchill, for instance, was very concerned that the popularity of the Soviet Union would overshadow the darkness of Communism.<sup>235</sup>

In order to respond to the challenges of the Left, right-wingers were forced to redefine their anti-socialism and clarify their anti-Sovietism. They agreed now, with the Left, that of course the Red Army was fighting well. The Right may even have misinterpreted some aspects of Soviet history. However, many argued indignantly, we must not go too far. Britain should not idolise the Soviet people, but should remember the great costs of Soviet advancement.<sup>236</sup> Neither should the public forget Britain's disappointing relations with the USSR and her untrustworthy leaders between 1939 and 1941. Even if recriminations were unhelpful at present, the Soviet leaders' actions did not encourage unstinting trust in the future. They were only fighting so valiantly now because Hitler had forced them to do so.<sup>237</sup> These reservations formed a solid obstacle to future co-operation, and the Left should not expect Britain to behave irresponsibly, as if the past were irrelevant.<sup>238</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> For example, there was a public backlash when some Conservatives made critical comments of Russia in the time of the alliance. See, for example, *Catholic Times*, 7 August 1942, p. 6; and 'The British Crisis: London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, July-August 1942, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 213.

<sup>234</sup> Jones, p. 89.

<sup>235</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 135, quoted in Northedge and Wells, p. 152.

<sup>236</sup> *National Review*, August 1941, p. 128 and November 1942, p. 386; H. G. Wood in *Left News*, August 1943, p. 2556; *Primrose League Gazette*, April 1942, p. 5; and *Catholic Times*, 7 August 1942, p. 6.

<sup>237</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Indirect (Russia), Streatham and Marylebone, 21.11.42 and 8/I: Reactions to CP poster, "Red Army", collected by MS in Walham Green, London, 6.8.41. See also MOA: T42 Posters 1939-47, 4/C: Red Army Poster August 1941, 6.8.41, General impressions at Kilburn.

<sup>238</sup> MOA: DR 2903, reply to January 1943 directive; and Keeble, p. 168.

Furthermore, the insistence of so many people that Britain was not doing enough to help the Soviet Union immediately met with indignation in right-wing quarters. Many on the Right were extremely generous to the USSR, vocally and practically supporting the Aid to Russia campaigns, and they objected violently to the minimisation of this support by the Left.<sup>239</sup> Britain had sent huge amounts of aid, they said, listing facts and figures, at great cost to herself.<sup>240</sup> Demands for an immediate second front were irresponsible. As one Conservative MP said:

Everyone sympathized with the Russian people in their gallant struggle against odds, but we were doing a great deal, and Russia would not be helped in the least by our rushing into foolish, unsound adventures; surely we had had enough of them already.<sup>241</sup>

Britain was already taking pressure off the Eastern Front with its air offensive on German towns and industrial areas, and its battles in North Africa and so on, and for the moment could do no more.<sup>242</sup> Conservatives reminded those who adulated the Soviet people and criticised the British of the history of 1940. The British Empire had been 'absolutely alone' in the fight against Hitler, others standing aside until they were attacked themselves.<sup>243</sup> Britain would do her best to help the USSR now, but if the Left thought it could manipulate Britain's sympathy for the Soviet Union, it was much mistaken.

By 1943, British anti-socialists were willing to concede points about the Soviet Union itself, but utterly resistant to left-wing plans for Britain. They did not want socialism, and they made this very clear. 'Communism has undoubtedly been a great step forward for Russia,' a surprising number of right-wingers agreed. Friendliness and co-operation with the Soviet state in the future was preferable. Some changes in the British system may even be in order. However, even at the height of the Soviet Union's popularity a large

---

<sup>239</sup> For example, *Daily Worker*, 7 September 1942, p. 2.

<sup>240</sup> *The Times*, 23 February 1943, p. 2; and *Catholic Times*, 20 November 1942, p. 6.

<sup>241</sup> Commander R. T. Bower, quoted in the *Times*, 4 September 1942, p. 2.

<sup>242</sup> *National Review*, September 1941, pp. 245-246.

<sup>243</sup> *Primrose League Gazette*, August 1942, p. 2; and *Catholic Times*, 21 August 1942, p. 7.

number of people continued to insist that Left politics were not for Britain.<sup>244</sup> 'What a mockery it would be if after all the sacrifice and bloodshed we defeated one form of State tyranny merely to find that we had ensconced another one in its place,' said the Conservative MP James Henderson Stewart.<sup>245</sup> These voices remembered the vacillations of the Communists, and the disillusionment of the Left. No sane voter would put power in such hands, they argued.<sup>246</sup> The years of the wartime alliance, therefore, were years in which the British Right realigned itself in relation to the Soviet Union. Core anti-Soviet beliefs were revised to differing degrees, but the Right could not allow itself to revise its opposition to socialism without facing the loss of its privileged position in society. Anti-socialism, as a result, was consolidated among these voices.

### **The left-wing anti-Soviets**

Anti-Stalinists on the Left were faced with the same events that challenged right-wing anti-Soviets in these years. However, the nature of the challenge to their intellectual positions was quite different. These left-wing anti-Soviets were also very diverse, and were comprised of many types of socialist of different extremes, committed to very different strategies in their quest for socialism. There were the revolutionaries of the extreme Left, for example, including the Trotskyists and groups such as the Revolutionary Socialist League of Great Britain. Then there were the more moderate groups like the idealistic Independent Labour Party (ILP), which only became anti-Stalinist in the late 1930s, after the indignation of its members at Soviet crimes in Spain became too much to bear. There were also a number of individuals, such as George Orwell or Lancelot Hogben, who found it difficult to fit into any one group, and whose disillusionment came in the mid to late 1930s.

---

<sup>244</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia Q.Q. Paddington, L.B., 20.11.42 and Indirect (Russia), Streatham and Marylebone, 21.11.42; T25 13/B, Post-war Co-operation: political attitudes survey 1941, 7.10.41; DR 1034, reply to January 1942 directive; T42 Posters 1939-47, 4/C: Red Army Poster August 1941, General impressions at Kensington, VT. Also see, for example, Lord Beaverbrook, quoted by R. Palme Dutt, 1942, p. 2 and in Northedge and Wells (1982), p. 151.

<sup>245</sup> *Primrose League Gazette*, January 1942, p. 9.

<sup>246</sup> MOA: T25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia Q.Q. Paddington, L.B., 20.11.42.

Many of these anti-Stalinists rejected what they saw as Stalin's perversion of Leninism, beginning in this particular period with his espousal of 'socialism in one country'. Trotskyists, for instance, agreed with their intellectual leader in his condemnation of Stalin. To build up a socialist economy in the USSR, while it stood alone as a socialist island, was not only wrong but also impossible. This policy contradicted the tenets of Marxism, Trotskyists said, by ignoring the need for a world revolution before a socialist economy could hope to prosper. When confronted with the reality of economic growth in the USSR, the left-wing anti-Soviets responded with criticism of Stalin's methods. For example, in 1937, Trotsky criticised the development of Stakhanovism and piecework in *The Revolution Betrayed*. While he did not believe that the existence of piecework was immediate proof of an anti-socialist system, he objected to the Stalinist implication that it was the pinnacle of socialist idealism.<sup>247</sup> Trotsky's British supporters, in publications like *The Militant*, accused Stalin of reversing the advance of Marxism in the Soviet Union. He may have achieved superficial growth, but this would not produce an enduring socialist system.<sup>248</sup>

Soon after the first Five Year Plan, anti-Stalinists were confronted with the rise of fascism in Germany. Many of them recognised as quickly as anyone else the dangers of fascism to the working classes. However, they rejected Soviet diplomacy, which claimed to protect the Soviet Union and, by extension, the working classes, by making alliances with the capitalist democracies. Everybody knew that Lenin had scoffed at the League of Nations, calling it the 'thieves' kitchen'—which the Soviet Union had joined, pulling on its apron in 1934.<sup>249</sup> For anti-Stalinist radicals on the Left, this diplomacy was proof of the degeneration of the Soviet leaders. By pursuing alliances with liberal democrats against fascism, the Soviet Union was simply bolstering up one form of capitalism at the expense of another. This class collaboration was completely wrong, and a betrayal of the international working classes. It was also unwise. 'In a powerful world proletariat lies the only sure defence of the U.S.S.R.,' insisted the *Youth Militant*.<sup>250</sup> Because the Soviet leaders were degenerate, however, they were fearful of the masses, and fearful for the

---

<sup>247</sup> L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?* (London, 1967), pp. 81-83.

<sup>248</sup> *The Militant*, November 1937, p. 3; and Trotsky, pp. 300-301.

<sup>249</sup> *ILP News*, 5 July 1934, p. 1, quoted in Lammers, p. 647.

<sup>250</sup> *Youth Militant*, February 1937, p. 3.

security of their own personal positions in the Soviet Union.<sup>251</sup> By insisting on this line, they had cut off the Communist movement at the knees, making the Communist position laughably inconsistent, and transforming the Communists into mere 'servants of Soviet foreign policy'.<sup>252</sup>

These more revolutionary anti-Stalinists also rejected the efforts of the Communist Party to engineer a 'united front' of the workers in Britain. The *Youth Militant* admitted that they were bound by doctrine to support a 'Leninist united front' of the 'organised working class on specific, immediate issues'. However, they utterly rejected the idea of a 'popular front', which necessarily involved class collaboration. Anti-Stalinists insisted that the involvement of capitalists and imperialists in any form of an anti-fascist people's front would only invite treachery, as shown by France's abandonment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. This was a predictable policy from such strict Marxists. When confronted with the 'Unity Campaign' of specifically working-class parties, however, anti-Stalinists continued to deny the Marxist legitimacy of such an effort. Such a campaign would only aid the Communists, Stalin's lackeys, wrote *The Militant*, while the Socialist League and the ILP would get nothing out of it. More importantly, continued the *Youth Militant*, this campaign was only the 'thin edge of the wedge for the Popular Front'.<sup>253</sup>

It was easier for the anti-Stalinists to reject Soviet diplomacy when they considered the direction of events in the USSR itself, or Communist crimes abroad. The counter-revolutionary policies of the Communists in Spain were a key part of this. The Communist attack on the POUM (the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) and other revolutionary socialists in Spain, for the sake of Soviet foreign policy, was a betrayal of Leninism. It horrified and incensed the anti-Stalinists.<sup>254</sup> It was also the catalyst for a number of important disillusionments, such as George Orwell's, or the ILP leaders'.<sup>255</sup> At approximately the same time, the purges and show trials of 1936-1938 provoked anger. 'The bureaucracy wades through a sea of blood in its efforts to obliterate the very

---

<sup>251</sup> *The Militant*, November 1937, p. 3.

<sup>252</sup> 'Inside the Whale', *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 513; *The Militant*, October 1937, p. 3; and *Fight*, April 1938, p. 3.

<sup>253</sup> *Youth Militant*, April 1937, p. 3; and *The Militant*, October 1938, p. 3 and July 1937, p. 2.

<sup>254</sup> *Workers Fight*, November 1938, p. 4; and *The Militant*, November 1937, p. 3.

<sup>255</sup> 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', *New English Weekly*, 29 July and 2 September 1937, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 269-273; and *New Leader*, 29 January 1937, p. 3.

memory of the revolution,' reported *The Militant*.<sup>256</sup> For the left-wing anti-Soviets, this was further proof of Stalin's degeneracy. Their blood boiled at the sight of 'Lenin's lieutenants' humbled and perjured by Stalin's 'bureaucratic clique'.<sup>257</sup> Hugh Kingsmill and Malcolm Muggeridge parodied the trials in their book *1938: A Preview of Next Year's News*, predicting that in 1938 Marx would be banned in the Soviet Union, and Lenin posthumously declared a Trotskyist.<sup>258</sup> Collaboration with the Communists in their united fronts, under such circumstances, was impossible.

All the same, Hitler showed his intentions more and more forcefully in the late 1930s. This was difficult to ignore, especially as even the anti-Stalinists still believed that the Soviet Union must be defended.<sup>259</sup> Despite this, most anti-Stalinists on the Left continued to reject the idea of alliances with the capitalist democracies. The ILP, newly disillusioned, argued with the rest of them that the Soviet Union had no place in the coming battle, which would be an imperialist war, as always. Instead, it should ally itself with the international working class, preparing to take advantage of rifts between capitalists in an effort to bring world revolution.<sup>260</sup> However, a few anti-Soviets on the Left were having second thoughts, especially in 1938 and 1939, as Hitler became more threatening. Leonard Woolf, for instance, had been disillusioned after the show trials in Moscow. Nevertheless, as historian F. M. Leventhal writes, Woolf was so troubled by the danger posed by Hitler in the late 1930s that he came to support a British alliance with the Soviet Union, despite the failings of its leaders.<sup>261</sup>

With Britain's entry into the war and the Soviet leaders' decision to make a pact with Nazi Germany, the situation changed again for the anti-Stalinists. Suddenly, the line of the CPGB changed to suit the needs of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. The scorn of the anti-Stalinists for the Communists increased. What 'dupes', said *The Militant*, mocking

---

<sup>256</sup> *The Militant*, November 1937, p. 3.

<sup>257</sup> *Youth Militant*, February 1937, p. 1.

<sup>258</sup> H. Kingsmill and M. Muggeridge, *1938: A Preview of Next Year's News* (London, 1937), pp. 41, 76, 84, 145, 150.

<sup>259</sup> *Fight*, April 1938, p. 3; and *The Militant*, 1 January 1940, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> *New Leader*, 12 May 1939, p. 2; and *Youth Militant*, February 1937, p. 3.

<sup>261</sup> F. M. Leventhal, 'Leonard Woolf and Kingsley Martin: Creative Tension on the Left', *Albion*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 1992), p. 286.

the CPGB's 'somersaults' of policy.<sup>262</sup> The anti-Stalinists continued to attack the Soviet leaders relentlessly, even as they called the working classes to the Soviet Union's defence, through revolution. Although it had been wrong to seek friendship with the democracies, it was doubly wrong to make a pact with the 'arch-apostle of anti-Socialism', said the *New Leader*, newspaper of the ILP.<sup>263</sup> These critics were disgusted by the events that followed the pact also. The invasion of Finland, for example, and the 'cynical lying' that accompanied it 'confuses and disorients the class-conscious workers everywhere'. Stalin had 'demoralised' the working classes, and in so doing undermined his best defence.<sup>264</sup> This was a point of view that had some currency in the dark days of 1940 among those disillusioned by Stalinism.

However, the wartime alliance of Britain with the Soviet Union from June 1941 muted the voices of left-wing anti-Soviets. For people like George Orwell, who had come to the conclusion that Hitler must be fought, support of some kind had to be expressed for the Soviet fight:

The Russians acknowledge seven hundred thousand casualties, and the armies are converging on Leningrad by the same roads as they followed twenty-two years ago. I never thought I should live to say 'Good luck to Comrade Stalin', but so I do.<sup>265</sup>

Even the revolutionary anti-Stalinists had always argued that, if the Soviet Union were attacked, the working class should rise to her defence. This was a difficult period for them, as they had to juggle their anti-Stalinism with their continued support for the Soviet workers. Their position did not tally with the mood of pro-Sovietism sweeping the country, and, in Orwell's opinion, they were particularly unsuccessful at making themselves heard or understood, even if the few publications they managed to release contained competent explanations of their anti-Stalinism.<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>262</sup> *The Militant*, March 1940, p. 1.

<sup>263</sup> *New Leader*, 25 August 1939, p. 3.

<sup>264</sup> *The Militant*, January 1940, p. 1, and February 1940, p. 2; and Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 359.

<sup>265</sup> 'London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, November-December 1941, quoted in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 154.

<sup>266</sup> 'London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, March-April 1942, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 179.

Overall, in the years between 1929 and 1943, the organised anti-Soviet Left did not successfully compete with the pro-Soviet orthodoxy it attacked. As Britain faced the increasingly frightening prospect of war, left-wing anti-Soviets failed to provide convincing alternatives to the Soviet policy of collective security. To most people, it did not seem that the difference between liberal democracy and fascism was a matter of indifference. When the ILP declared in August 1939 that Stalin's agreement with Hitler was worse than his efforts to work with the Western democracies, it tacitly accepted this general feeling, and its interpretation suffered as a result.<sup>267</sup> The anti-Stalinist groups on the extreme Left seemed to contradict themselves in other ways, too, when they called for a united front of workers as the only hope for the Soviet Union's defence, but rejected all attempts to build this united front. Likewise, they made no efforts to build it themselves, other than making impassioned calls for the defence of the Soviet Union at the same time as they decried everything that was wrong with it.<sup>268</sup> They were inflexible and dogmatic; they were unable to see past their ideological blinkers and face the reality of the danger posed by Hitler to the Soviet Union and to the European working classes.

By their dogmatism, they also excluded a number of talented individuals who had become disillusioned with pro-Sovietism in this period, such as George Orwell, or the scientist and popular writer Lancelot Hogben. Both Orwell and Hogben had been disenchanted by the realities of Soviet Communism, despite an initial interest. This cut them off from the orthodox Left of the anti-fascist era.<sup>269</sup> Neither was disposed towards moderation in politics, and this should have created a bond with the extreme Left.<sup>270</sup> But Hogben and Orwell were not welcome on the organised anti-Stalinist Left. They

---

<sup>267</sup> *New Leader*, 25 August 1939, p. 3.

<sup>268</sup> *Youth Militant*, February 1937, p. 3, and April 1937, p. 3.

<sup>269</sup> Werskey, pp. 162-163, 202; L. Hogben, *Lancelot Hogben's Dangerous Thoughts* (London, 1939), p. 195-196; 'Review: The Novel Today', *New English Weekly*, 31 December 1936, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 257-258; 'Review: Assignment in Utopia', *New English Weekly*, 9 June 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 334; 'Review: The Freedom of the Streets', *New English Weekly*, 16 June 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 336; and 'Review: Russia Under Soviet Rule', *New English Weekly*, 12 January 1939, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 381.

<sup>270</sup> Werskey, pp. 162-165, 184; L. Hogben, *The Retreat from Reason* (London, 1937), p. 45; 'Review: The Freedom of the Streets', *New English Weekly*, 16 June 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 337; and 'The Lion and the Unicorn', not published in full, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, pp. 85-86.



questioned Marx's foresight; they insisted, heretically, on the abolition of censorship on the Left; they valued democracy in itself. Orwell believed that the Nazis should be fought, and that patriotism was a socialist virtue. He joined the ILP in 1937, but left when the war began, rejecting its party line, which made 'things easier for Hitler'. Hogben enjoyed referring to Marxist dialectics as 'obscurantist rubbish', and he thought that Trotsky was 'irrelevant'.<sup>271</sup> Such ideas were destined for rejection among the dogmatic anti-Stalinist Left, and so individuals like Orwell and Hogben were left drifting, isolated from most of the Left, because of their insistence on remaining intellectually honest.

### The coping mechanisms

In this period, British anti-Soviets were compelled, by a variety of events and arguments, to respond to the challenge of the Soviet Union. Their responses demonstrate a number of coping mechanisms which were used to deal with the pressure of opposing arguments or with events that subverted the tenets of the anti-Soviet paradigms. They were chosen in accordance with the amount of pressure that was put on anti-Soviet beliefs. In times of lesser challenges the most basic coping mechanism could be used, but more complicated mechanisms would take its place in times of greater challenge. If, after a certain event, coping was no longer possible, this led to a break with the paradigm, which for an individual or group could no longer be sustained.

---

<sup>271</sup> 'Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party', *New Leader*, 24 June 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 336-338; 'Review: The Communist International', *New English Weekly*, 22 September 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 350; 'Review: Russia Under Soviet Rule', *New English Weekly*, 12 January 1939, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 381; 'Inside the Whale', *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 518-519; 'My Country Right or Left', *Folios of New Writing*, Autumn 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 539; 'Autobiographical Note', *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 23; 'Prophecies of Fascism', *Tribune*, 12 July 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 31; 'As One Non-Combatant to Another', *Tribune*, 18 June 1943, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, pp. 299-303; Werskey, pp. 161-162, 165, 183, 202; Hogben, *Retreat from Reason*, pp. 16, 24, 37-38; and Hogben, *Dangerous Thoughts*, pp. 194-195, 196.

### 1. *Ignore the challenge or deny that it is a challenge*

This was the favoured response, used where possible by adherents to the anti-Soviet paradigm. Extremists, especially, clung to this coping mechanism, as their view of a wholly bad Soviet Union could not be sustained if they made any admission of Soviet achievements. For them, the Soviet Union had to be unsuccessful and uncivilised within, incapable of genuine progress, and malevolent without, committed to schemes of world domination. Even less extreme anti-Soviets often ignored the reports of Soviet successes that threatened their own assumptions.

Ignoring or denying the challenge was the initial response of some anti-Soviets to the reports of economic growth under the first Five Year Plan. At a time of great stress in Britain itself, the challenge of Soviet industrialisation was great, but many anti-Soviets still argued that planning was deeply flawed. Sound economic growth through socialist methods was an illusion, they believed. As the fruits of planning gradually became clear, denial was increasingly problematic as a strategy of coping, but in the years of planning's infancy, rejection was an easy option. 'The system ... will not work,' reported the *Times* in 1929.<sup>272</sup> The *Primrose League Gazette* agreed, reporting that planning was 'barbarous and incompatible with the standards of civilised communities', just like any other feature of Soviet life.<sup>273</sup>

Many right-wing anti-Soviets also denied for as long as possible that Nazism posed a threat to their perception of Soviet Communism as the greatest danger to Europe. These anti-Soviets were faced with teetering scales on which the perceived threat of Bolshevik expansion was balanced against the perceived threat of fascist expansion. Early on, when Hitler seemed rational and predictable and when suspicion continued that Stalin was fomenting world revolution, it was easy to deny that Hitler was the greater threat. Thus, Litvinov's diplomacy at the League of Nations was rejected as mischievous. Even fascist aggression in Spain was overshadowed by the Soviet Union's involvement there, and so it was ignored by most. Even when Hitler's aggressive tendencies became more obvious, from the time of the Spanish Civil War onwards, many anti-Soviets continued to

---

<sup>272</sup> The *Times*, 14 September 1929, p. 11.

<sup>273</sup> *Primrose League Gazette*, May 1933, p. 6.

deny that he was dangerous to Britain. As late as 1939, the threat of Communism weighed more heavily on the scales than Nazism for some anti-Soviets, such as Francis Yeats-Brown or A. P. Laurie, who continued to believe that the most immediate threat to Europe was Bolshevik expansionism.<sup>274</sup>

Anti-Stalinists on the extreme Left were also confronted by the development of fascism in Europe. They rejected Soviet diplomacy, because it sought out alliances with the capitalist democracies against fascism. Anti-Stalinists insisted that Stalin had betrayed the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, which rejected both fascism and liberal democracy, in the conviction that both forms of government propped up capitalism. If war came, it would be a war of 'rival imperialisms', with which the Soviet Union should have nothing to do. Instead, the Communists should use war as an opportunity to bring revolution in the capitalist states, just as the Bolsheviks had used the First World War to bring revolution to the USSR.

In the context of the late 1930s, this was a difficult position to maintain. The glimpses of the approaching war in places like Spain were terrifying, and the policies of the Nazis in Germany were repulsive. Hitler's aggressive intentions towards the Communist East were vividly clear. It became increasingly clear to most of the Left that fascism must be resisted, at least for the sake of the Soviet revolution if not for the future of British imperialism. However, if Stalin's left-wing critics were to sustain their ideological position, they could not allow his form of diplomacy to be justified in any way. The result was a policy of complete denial.

## *2. Attempt to divert attention from the challenge*

If denial was no longer possible, the next best step was diversion. It was used when anti-Soviets saw, consciously or unconsciously, that the challenge of the USSR was too strong to be ignored or denied entirely. This allowed anti-Soviets to avoid admissions that could damage their paradigm, by simply distracting attention from the issue in question. This is a basic coping mechanism, and so it was used often. At its best, it could be subtle.

---

<sup>274</sup> Yeats-Brown, pp. 20-22, 65; and Laurie, pp. 58-59.

Stories of Soviet crimes were trotted out regularly by anti-Soviets as a counter to stories of Soviet achievements. This can be seen in the response to Soviet industrialisation of the early 1930s. In order to criticise the Labour Government's decision to trade with the USSR, and in order to distract attention from rising Soviet production, anti-Soviets targeted scandals of Soviet life. Forced labour, 'dumping' and the Metro-Vickers crisis were all opportunities for the Right to make sudden attacks on Soviet industrialisation, to avoid having to face up to its increasingly obvious successes. This tactic was especially apparent in the atrocity stories that blossomed during the religious persecution campaign in 1929-1930 and during the Spanish Civil War. These stories undoubtedly had a measure of success, but their instigators sometimes lost control of them, as the Conservative Party found in 1930, when the religious protest they initiated led to a major crisis in state-church relations. This drove more moderate people more firmly away.

However, diversionary strategies did have a lot of potential. Right-wing anti-Soviets used them in their most subtle form during the wartime alliance, when Soviet victories undermined their belief that socialism could not produce a powerful and united nation. The depth of gratitude to the Soviet people in Britain was such that it was impossible to deny at this point that Britain owed much to the Soviet Union. This was an admission that strengthened the left-wing case for socialism, and had to be resisted. It was possible to do this by employing diversionary tactics, and praising just as loudly as everybody else the 'great Russian people' who were fighting so valiantly.<sup>275</sup> By focusing on the people, one could deflect praise from their socialist system and their leaders. Whether clearly or implicitly, most right-wing voices drew this distinction further by loudly applauding Russian patriotism, the force that had inspired such courageous and determined fighting. Stalin's speeches invoking the Russian 'Motherland' were gleefully repeated. Even the admission that Britain need not fear Soviet internationalism was followed with the explanation that this was because the Soviet fight proved that 'Holy

---

<sup>275</sup> For example, the *Times*, 2 January 1942, p. 5; *National Review*, November 1942, p. 386; and 'London Letter to Partisan Review', *Partisan Review*, July-August 1942 in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 213.

Russia' was far more important to the Soviet people.<sup>276</sup> This method proved a politically savvy way for those on the Right to praise the Soviet people without finding their own words used in defence of socialism. It also undercut the Left's claims that the Soviet Union was fighting well because of its socialism.

### *3. Partially acknowledge the challenge, but do not absorb its implications into the paradigm*

Sometimes, it became necessary to admit that the challenge to the anti-Soviet paradigms was strong. Whether Soviet domestic policy looked increasingly good, or Stalin's foreign policy looked increasingly wise, some admissions had to be made. This obviously involved more danger to the consistency of the anti-Soviet paradigms than the previous two coping mechanisms, going further towards a positive view of the Soviet Union. However, once these admissions were made, they did not have to be absorbed into the paradigm, or given a wider significance. Instead, anti-Soviets could explain away their admissions, arguing that they were irrelevant and had no wider implications. Occasionally, they even ignored their admissions entirely.

This coping mechanism can be seen at work in the way newspapers like the *Times* coped with their reluctant admissions of Soviet industrial progress during the first and second Five Year Plans. Because its writers and editors did not want to allow that the Soviet system challenged the superiority of the capitalist system, they would follow their admissions with the explanation that this progress was only at the expense of socialist methods. Successes in the increased production of gold, for example, 'had been made only at the price of considerable deviation from Socialist practice'.<sup>277</sup> Anti-Soviets also explained away Soviet achievements in the industrial sphere by claiming that they had only been achieved by lowering Soviet living standards dramatically. This was the argument of the Duchess of Atholl's 1931 book, *The Conscription of a People*:

---

<sup>276</sup> *National Review*, December 1941, p. 587 and November 1941, p. 471; and the *Times*, 22 February 1943, p. 2.

<sup>277</sup> The *Times*, 11 February 1935, p. 20. See also the *Times*, 11 April 1935, p. 15.

The steadily mounting figures of production and exports ... are in striking contrast to the picture they draw of the Russian people. ... The Russian people, under-nourished, ill-clothed, and miserably housed, are toiling to make and export agricultural produce or manufactured goods they urgently need themselves.<sup>278</sup>

Comments like these are significant in that they acknowledged that figures of production *were* rising. However, these admissions were immediately undercut by what came after them.

These kinds of explanations also appeared in the years of the wartime alliance, when some of the most extreme anti-Soviet voices had to admit that the Soviet people appeared to be well led and that tolerance of other points of view seemed to be blossoming. Hidden in this praise, however, were explanations of why this was happening. Instead of concluding that socialism as seen in the Soviet Union was being reformed, or that it had advantages over the British system, these voices interpreted the facts in an anti-socialist way. If the Red Army was well led, for instance, some anti-Soviets explained that this was *only* because the Soviet forces had reinstated traditional military hierarchies. 'So pass away, by degrees, the 'isms that stalk the world for a generation,' wrote W. J. Blyton in the *National Review*.<sup>279</sup> This was a favourite approach of the *Catholic Times*. Marxism, the paper said, had failed in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet leaders realised this:

The changes taking place in Russia may be for the good, just as Russia's military defence has undoubtedly contributed largely to the destruction of the German menace. But it will be years to come before the enthusiasts for Communist Russia abroad will acknowledge that they are out of date, the supporters of a creed and cause which the original revolutionaries have abandoned.<sup>280</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> Atholl, *Conscription*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>279</sup> *National Review*, September 1941, p. 303.

<sup>280</sup> *Catholic Times*, 18 June 1943, p. 6.

So positive change in the Soviet Union could be explained away, allowing these voices to praise the Soviet Union without having to assimilate this praise into their anti-Soviet understanding.

#### *4. Praise certain issues strongly, leading to some revision of the paradigm*

This was a step that was taken when, for various reasons, it became impossible to explain away everything that was praiseworthy about the Soviet Union. It did not mean a break with the anti-Soviet paradigm, because such revision was limited to some aspects of it. All the same, it did weaken the paradigm, as expressions of friendly feeling towards the Soviet Union became more common, and as expressions of total enmity became less frequent.

The paradigms of a number of significant anti-Soviets underwent some revision in the period leading up to the outbreak of war. People like the Duchess of Atholl were still anti-Soviet after they began to support Soviet diplomacy; as she herself said at the Second Congress of Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R., 'I had better make it quite clear to those who in the last few months have been saying that I had become a member of the Communist Party that I come here today as an unrepentant Conservative.' However, she had altered aspects of her anti-Soviet beliefs. In the past she had specifically called for Britain to cut all ties with the Soviet Union, because its leaders were morally reprehensible. Now, she called for a strengthening of ties:

The continued co-operation of this country with the Soviet Union, through the League of Nations, whatever we may think about the Soviet system as a whole, is absolutely essential to the cause we all have so much at heart.<sup>281</sup>

This was very much a pragmatic decision, and involved no change of heart. It is very unlikely that the Duchess thought any differently in 1937 about forced labour in the Soviet Union than she had in 1931. However, she was willing at this point to attribute some positive attributes to the Soviet leaders, such as good behaviour in foreign affairs

---

<sup>281</sup> *For Peace and Friendship* (1937), pp. 65, 69, 74-75; and Atholl, *Conscription*, pp. 189-190.

and a desire for peace. Other Conservatives, such as Vyvyan Adams, echoed her in this, applauding Stalin's decision to build socialism in one country rather than export it abroad.<sup>282</sup> This revision to anti-Soviet assumptions was certainly not total, but admissions were made which were not explained away. They were incorporated into the paradigms of those who made them, and these anti-Soviets became much less outspoken and virulent in their criticism.

The beginnings of revision can also be seen in the months immediately prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, when important and vocal anti-Soviets began to recognise the claims of Soviet diplomacy. The excesses of Hitler were so disgusting to them that collective security with the USSR became more and more attractive, if not celebrated. Moreover, disappointment with their own British leaders brought on the beginnings of a revision of ideas that had for most of the 1930s been accepted as gospel. Even some extreme anti-Soviets, like Lord Rothermere, no longer believed that Stalin's first aim was always world revolution. Now, it seemed that Stalin genuinely wanted peace. These ideas did not have much time to germinate, due to the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the outbreak of war, and so they did not lead to a permanent revision of the anti-Soviet paradigm. Nevertheless, revision did come later, during the wartime alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union. At this point, many anti-Soviets admitted that the Soviet system had improved Russian efficiency, that the Soviet leaders were trustworthy as military leaders, that the extreme bias they had held against the Soviet state in the past had perhaps been unfair, and more. These were extensive revisions to make. They did not, however, result in most anti-Soviets becoming pro-Soviets. While Communism may have been an improvement for Russia and its Empire, or while the Soviet Union may have managed to progress despite its Communism, these people still insisted that the Soviet model was definitely not for Britain. They revised their paradigm, basing it much more around anti-socialism than anti-Sovietism.

*5. Make more general and basic admissions about the Soviet Union, leading to a paradigm shift*

---

<sup>282</sup> *For Peace and Friendship* (1937), pp. 62-63, 73.



Among anti-Soviets, those who broke with the anti-Soviet paradigm, becoming pro-Soviet in identity, were few. Those who revised their anti-Sovietism were not always challenged by their contemporaries to go further. The Left on the whole welcomed people like the Duchess of Atholl into the popular front against fascism without asking them to change their fundamental beliefs. However, there was movement into the pro-Soviet Left during the war, as a result of the Soviet alliance. This was not usually the case among figures in the public eye, but some people questioned by Mass-Observation expressed the opinion that it was clear now that the voices of anti-Soviet propaganda had got so much wrong about the Soviet Union before the war that their entire point of view was compromised fatally. These individuals had broken with anti-Sovietism.<sup>283</sup>

More specifically, it is possible to bring forward the example of Sir Bernard Pares as an anti-Soviet who shifted to pro-Sovietism. Pares was an historian and an academic with a long-standing speciality in Russian studies. He kept out of the Conservative Party, but was inclined to Conservative beliefs. In the early years of the revolution, he had toured areas of Russia outside Bolshevik control, speaking out against the Bolsheviks. He continued in his anti-Sovietism into the 1930s, until he was finally allowed into the Soviet Union in 1935. On his tour of the country he was so impressed by what he saw that he was popularly seen as pro-Soviet from this point on. Pares came to believe that Communism was a very positive development for Russia, although it would be inappropriate for Britain, where gradualism, instead, would produce socialism. He approved highly of the social changes the Soviet leaders had made. He also applauded the goals of Soviet diplomacy in the 1930s. The major obstacle for him was the suppression of religion in the Soviet Union, but this did not prevent him from continuing to express his friendship for the Soviet Union and his hope that its people would be left in peace.<sup>284</sup> Pares was an unusual case, as prominent anti-Soviets rarely experienced such radical paradigm shift. As a Russophile, he was, perhaps, more susceptible to pro-Sovietism, and found it easier to change his point of view on socialism in the Soviet Union as a result.

---

<sup>283</sup> See, for example, MOA: DR unidentified, reply to January 1943 directive.

<sup>284</sup> B. Pares, *A Wandering Student: The Story of a Purpose* (New York, 1948), pp. 269, 324-325, 337-339, 349, 359-360; *For Peace and Friendship* (1937), pp. 123-125; and B. Pares, *Moscow Admits a Critic* (London, 1936), pp. 21, 89-94.

## **Conclusion**

Most critics of the Soviet Union, in the years between 1929 and 1943, had to cope with unceasing and sometimes powerful challenges from the Soviet Union and its supporters. Beginning with the five year plans, and continuing right into the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union against the Third Reich, anti-Soviets were faced with events that seemed to undermine their belief systems. And yet somehow most anti-Soviets managed to maintain these belief systems. Even the intense challenges of the wartime alliance did not destroy anti-Sovietism. This was possible because they utilised powerful coping mechanisms, which saved them from having to acknowledge all the evidence, from having to admit their own inconsistencies, or having to abandon their paradigm.

## Chapter Three

### Pro-Soviet responses to the Soviet Union, 1929-1943

The pro-Soviet Left between 1929 and 1943 was a confusing conglomeration of groups and ideas, rife with tensions. One of the few things that united its adherents was its identification with the Soviet land. Whether totally or partially, the Soviet Union was, for most of the Left, an icon of socialism. Moreover, and sometimes more powerfully, the British Left's enemies generally corresponded with the Soviet Union's enemies. However, the years between 1929 and 1943 also presented British left-wingers with many reasons to question their affinity with the Soviet land. Marxism at work in the Soviet Union appeared to be brutal, or abrasive, and even at times anti-socialist. Working out these tensions between hope for the Soviet leaders and despair at their crimes was a complicated process. Like the anti-Soviets, pro-Soviets were forced to employ coping mechanisms in response to events that challenged their basic assumptions about the socialist state.

In this chapter, I will explore the response of the pro-Soviet Left to these difficult issues by looking at key episodes of the 1930s in a rough but not exact chronological order. Beginning with the exigencies of the first Five Year Plan and diplomatic crises such as the Metro-Vickers trials, I will show how pro-Soviets responded to the attacks of the Right up until 1933. Next, I will present the general problems pro-Soviets faced when dealing with Soviet political freedoms, or the lack thereof. This will be followed by a more specific, in-depth analysis of the reactions of British pro-Soviets to the Moscow show trials of 1936 to 1938. After this, I will discuss the effects of the rise of Nazism from 1933 on pro-Soviet arguments about the Soviet Union, followed by the effects of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and subsequent events on pro-Soviet cohesiveness in the early years of the Second World War. Finally, I will analyse the effects of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, and the Anglo-Soviet alliance which followed it, on pro-Soviet public discourse. The chapter will conclude with a general analysis of the coping mechanisms used by pro-Soviets, compared with the coping mechanisms of anti-Soviets.

## Planning and collectivisation

For the British Left in the early 1930s, the Great Depression was further proof that capitalism was a deeply flawed system. The misery of the unemployed was deeply and bitterly felt by most socialists. The economic crisis produced despair, a disillusionment that was profound and permanent. It radicalised many, who learned to place economic vitality and economic freedoms over many other kinds of freedoms, freedoms which may have existed on paper in Britain but were absolutely meaningless when the workers could not provide for the most basic needs of their families.

The pro-Soviet Left had already observed with interest the move in the Soviet Union from the New Economic Policy to Five Year Plans and large-scale industrialisation. With the Depression, however, Soviet efforts to make socialism work became much more inspiring. Planning involved massive sacrifice, it was admitted, but 'Moscow had yielded to no spirit of resignation,' as Maurice Hindus reported. 'With its loins girded for the severest battle in its history, it fairly roared with effort and determination.'<sup>285</sup> The vibrancy of the Soviet effort, in itself, was exciting. But pro-Soviets also emphasised the successes of this effort, emphasising the remarkable development of the Soviet economy out of its former backwardness.<sup>286</sup> Its spectacular productive growth had eliminated unemployment, or so it seemed, and the Soviet Union could not get enough workers.<sup>287</sup> The contrast between Soviet economic dynamism and the infirmity of the capitalist economies could not have been more telling.

As a result, the Soviet Union became an even greater icon to many on the Left, while to some it even became a kind of spiritual home. In John Strachey's opinion, 'to travel from the capitalist world into Soviet territory is to pass from death to birth.'<sup>288</sup> The Soviet Union offered an alternative path—not an easy path, but a path that would lead to a better, fairer and more stable society. Communists called for the immediate adoption of

---

<sup>285</sup> M. Hindus, *Red Bread* (London, 1931), p. 82.

<sup>286</sup> For example, 'Soviet Union Beats Capitalist Britain', *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1931, p. 2.

<sup>287</sup> A. Wicksteed, 'The Labour Shortage in Moscow – Where There is No Unemployment', *Forward*, 3 January 1931, quoted in Williams, p. 140.

<sup>288</sup> Strachey, p. 359.

the Soviet model,<sup>289</sup> but even some moderates on the Left considered applying elements of the Soviet system to Britain. Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party from 1935, argued at this point that ‘we have to take the strong points of the Russian system and apply them to this country.’<sup>290</sup>

Under these circumstances, the attacks of the Right on the USSR were not so difficult to reject outright. They were seen as desperate attempts to avoid facing the flaws inherent in capitalist society. While pro-Soviets often admitted imperfections in the Soviet Union, these were explained away, and their relevance to the larger question—creating a stable economic system—denied completely. It became common to refer to planning as the ‘Soviet experiment’.<sup>291</sup> Such a project did not require immediate perfection. Besides, the experience of the depression was so traumatic that Soviet flaws became almost irrelevant. ‘It is idle to denounce the Bolsheviks or pretend that we are not living on a volcano,’ wrote the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*.<sup>292</sup> Many pro-Soviets reacted similarly when faced with other anti-Soviet accusations. For example, when right-wingers said that the Bolsheviks had only achieved any of their successes by drastically lowering living standards, even Communists did not seem to have a problem admitting that the Soviet people did not live in luxury. ‘In a sense,’ admitted the *Daily Worker*, ‘everybody in Russia is working with a tight belt.’<sup>293</sup> The point of contention was the purpose of the sacrifice being made by the people of the Soviet Union. They, at least, were building something. In the West, the hardship of the workers contributed to nothing.<sup>294</sup>

Strangely, however, the same pro-Soviets sometimes contradicted themselves by denying that ordinary Soviet citizens wanted for anything. Visitors to the USSR insisted that life in the Soviet land was pleasant. One famous group of left-wing travellers

---

<sup>289</sup> See, for example, *Daily Worker*, 3 November 1931, p. 5.

<sup>290</sup> C. R. Attlee, *Problems of a Socialist Government*, ed. by Sir Stafford Cripps (Gollancz, 1933), p. 203, quoted in Northedge and Wells, p. 187.

<sup>291</sup> See, for example, *English Review*, March 1929, p. 256; W. Rukeyser, *Working for the Soviets: An American Engineer in Russia* (London, 1935), p. 25; and H. Johnson, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (London, 1940), p. 360.

<sup>292</sup> Quoted in *Daily Worker*, 16 October 1931, p. 5.

<sup>293</sup> *Daily Worker*, 1 January 1931, p. 3; and Strachey, *Coming Struggle*, pp. 356–357.

<sup>294</sup> *Daily Worker*, 29 August 1930, p. 1; and 7 May 1931, p. 3.

included George Bernard Shaw, Margaret Cole and D. N. Pritt. They sent a joint statement to papers like the *Manchester Guardian*:

We, the undersigned, are recent visitors to the U.S.S.R. Some of us travelled through the greater part of its civilised territory. We desire to record that we saw nowhere evidence of such economic slavery, privation, unemployment, and cynical despair of betterment as are accepted as inevitable [by much of the British press].<sup>295</sup>

When anti-Soviets accused the Soviet leaders of using forced labour, the travellers' accounts were useful again. If they had seen no evidence of such labour, it could not possibly exist—according, at least, to the *Daily Worker*. Travellers who were not left-wingers were particularly useful—they could be portrayed both as closer to the action, *and* less biased than critics.<sup>296</sup>

Pro-Soviets also diverted attention from Soviet flaws by pointing out flaws of the critics and of their system. Criticism of the collapsed economic system was obviously a major aspect of this, but it was also common to accuse critics of hypocrisy. The Right was outraged by religious persecution or forced labour in the Soviet Union, but it had never had a problem with this in Tsarist Russia, or anywhere else.<sup>297</sup> As one correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian* wrote:

The fact is that until this atrocity-mongering ... was made into political profit the present generation took no steps whatever to raise its voice against persecution. ... Surely we cannot at this stage get up in dignified protest and feel that our hands are clean. ... We cannot pick and choose, or our motives are suspect.<sup>298</sup>

The *Daily Worker* emphasised this during the right-wing campaign against forced labour. While its writers denied there was any slave labour in the Soviet Union, they also

---

<sup>295</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1933, p. 18.

<sup>296</sup> For example, 'Timber Capitalist Says Slave Labour Tales "Absolutely Untrue"', *Daily Worker*, 17 March 1932, p. 5.

<sup>297</sup> Brailsford, 'Russia and Religion', *New Leader*, 21 February 1930, quoted in Williams, p. 109.

<sup>298</sup> Leonard Harding, *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1930, p. 20.

insisted that, if there was, it was nothing to the slavery enforced on indigenous peoples in the British Empire.<sup>299</sup> This tactic made it easier for pro-Soviets to ignore anti-Soviet protest by taking the high moral ground from the protesters.

The issue of Soviet agricultural policy was more complicated than these other problems. The Right condemned the collectivisation of the Soviet countryside, as could be expected. Collectivisation was not only doomed to failure, they said. It was forced upon the Soviet peasants with monumental brutality.<sup>300</sup> This is not surprising criticism from conservatives. However, one report in an influential left-wing book, *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia*, subverted a positive stance on collectivisation. John Morgan's account of his six weeks in the USSR was a measured account of his 'uneasiness' about certain aspects of Soviet agricultural policy. The land he saw was good, but was not being farmed well. He was confused, because the theory behind collectivisation seemed to be so good. He blamed some of the problems on the 'recalcitrant' peasants, but thought even so that the state had made mistakes in dealing with them. In the end he had to conclude that the socialist leaders had been thinking too 'mechanistically' about farming, treating nature as if it were predictable or controllable.<sup>301</sup> This report was all the more challenging because it came from an acknowledged expert, who wanted collectivisation to work.

Initially, pro-Soviets tended to deny or ignore these reports. Most left-wingers were in fact very optimistic about the future of collectivisation. Maurice Hindus, for example, who was no Communist, wrote in his widely read *Red Bread* that collectivisation was a necessary step forward for the Soviet Union. Its cost had been 'prodigious', both in economic and human terms. However, it was overwhelmingly superior to what had gone before.<sup>302</sup> Meanwhile, the Communists were completely sure that collectivisation was well on its way to success, ignoring anything that suggested otherwise. Collectivisation had brought civilisation to the countryside, and led to much bigger

---

<sup>299</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4 February 1931, p. 1.

<sup>300</sup> See, for instance, *Daily Mail*, 18 February 1932, p. 13; the *Times*, 3 August 1932, p. 11; and Atholl, *Conscription*, p. 80.

<sup>301</sup> J. Morgan, 'Agriculture', in Cole, *Twelve Studies*, pp. 109, 112-113, 116-117, 119.

<sup>302</sup> Hindus, pp. 337, 340.

harvests. They romanticised this, emphasising the mind-blowing bigness of the project in all its modernity.<sup>303</sup>

The whole dynamic of the issue changed in March 1933, when reports of a horrific famine in the Soviet Union came through. Two British journalists, Malcolm Muggeridge and Gareth Jones, returned from the USSR and wrote about the famine that had desolated the Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and other areas, and which they claimed was a direct result of Communist policy. Unlike most Western journalists in the Soviet Union, both had managed to tour some of the worst affected areas. Muggeridge anonymously published his articles in the *Manchester Guardian*, while Jones was published in a range of papers across the world, as well as writing letters in support of Muggeridge to the *Guardian*. Both reported that the civilian population was starving, and many had died and would die. The affected areas were governed by military terrorism, and all their grain removed by force.<sup>304</sup> Both strongly denounced the claim that these problems were the fault of the kulaks.<sup>305</sup> Collectivisation had suddenly become a very difficult issue.

The Communist Party was very slow to respond to the challenge, focusing instead on the Metro-Vickers crisis. This was simple to deal with, from their point of view, requiring only the diversion of all blame onto the British Government. It was difficult, however, to respond to Jones and Muggeridge, who were not traditional right-wing anti-Soviets, and whose reports, devoid of an anti-socialist bias, seemed plausible to many. When the *Daily Worker* did eventually acknowledge the reports, it entirely ignored the right-wing press, and focused on refuting the articles published in the *Manchester Guardian*, which for some time had presented a pro-Soviet point of view in general. In April the *Daily Worker* alluded to 'a new campaign of incitement' in the Liberal press. Finally, in May, it published three articles by the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU). Muggeridge did not have enough proof, the FSU argued. Anyway, things had been much worse in the times of the tsars, and anything that was wrong was the fault of the kulaks.<sup>306</sup> The overwhelming instinct of these very committed pro-Soviets, then, was to retreat into the

---

<sup>303</sup> *Daily Worker*, 24 September 1930, p. 3; and 26 March 1930, p. 9.

<sup>304</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1933, p. 13; and 30 March 1933, p. 12.

<sup>305</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 March 1933, p. 9.

<sup>306</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4 April 1933, p. 5; 8 May 1933, p. 4; 9 May 1933, p. 4; and 11 May 1933, p. 4.



most basic coping mechanism, by ignoring or denying the challenge posed to their worldview by famine in the USSR.

Less politically-committed pro-Soviets did not deny the famine completely, although some agreed with the FSU that the two journalists had gone too far. One writer to the *Manchester Guardian*, for instance, echoed the FSU, urging a 'historical' view of the Soviet countryside. Under Tsarism, he said, the peasants had been even worse off.<sup>307</sup> However, the *Manchester Guardian* was marked now by its support for Muggeridge's articles, even though it had been mostly supportive of collectivisation before this point. The editor attacked 'the terrible myopia which self-complacent dogmatism has aggravated' among the leaders of the workers' state. 'The Communist dictators cannot see because they will not see.'<sup>308</sup> The newspaper defended Muggeridge's articles as 'essentially' factual, and criticised the FSU's attempts to evade the issue.<sup>309</sup>

However, the issue of the famine was sidelined for most of the pro-Soviet Left by other events. The Metro-Vickers affair, in all its drama, was taking place at precisely the same time as the Soviet famine was exposed. Initially, even pro-Soviet newspapers were disposed to condemn the arrests of the British engineers. For Kingsley Martin, of the *New Statesman and Nation*, the charges were 'incredible', even 'deplorable'.<sup>310</sup> However, the knee-jerk reaction of the British Government and the fury of the right-wing press transferred the criticism of the Left away from the Soviet leaders. In slapping an embargo on Soviet goods before anything had even been decided in trial, and calling for even more extreme measures in the right-wing media, right-wingers diverted Left criticism onto themselves. Soon after writing the above, Martin wrote in disgust that the genuine concern many people felt for the British men imprisoned in Moscow had been 'overwhelmed in an orgy of prejudice and passion' on the Right.<sup>311</sup> Britain's leaders were 'gambling' with the prisoners' safety and with British-Soviet trade by being as provocative as possible towards the Communist leaders.

---

<sup>307</sup> W. R. Stoker, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1933, p. 18.

<sup>308</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 March 1933, p. 8.

<sup>309</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 9 May 1933, p. 20.

<sup>310</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 18 March 1933, p. 310.

<sup>311</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 8 April 1933, p. 433.

Many on the pro-Soviet Left were doubtful about original arrests themselves, but recognition of the Right's blind hatred for the Soviet Union overwhelmed these feelings, and polarised the anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet groups still further. Editors of newspapers like the *Daily Herald*, the *Economist* and the *Manchester Guardian* could not escape the conclusion that the British Right was so unrestrained in its abhorrence of the USSR that it had lost all sense of control.<sup>312</sup> The Soviet leaders, who seemed to be making efforts to appease British opinion, looked better in comparison, despite the foolishness of the initial arrests.<sup>313</sup> The drama of the stand-off well and truly overshadowed the Left's own criticism of the Metro-Vickers trials. The editor of the *Daily Herald*, for instance, seemed more shocked by the 'fierce hatred of Soviet Russia' than by the arrests themselves.<sup>314</sup>

Sadly, however, the Metro-Vickers affair also overshadowed the quieter issue of the Soviet famine that had been in the news at the same time, from March to May 1933. For instance, although in January the *New Statesman and Nation* published three articles about serious crop problems in the Soviet Union,<sup>315</sup> it entirely ignored the revelations of Muggeridge and Jones concerning man-made famine in the USSR. The *Daily Herald* also ignored these reports. By contrast, the *Daily Herald* published fifty-four articles and seven editorials on the subject of the Metro-Vickers affair in March and April alone, while the weekly *New Statesman* published nine pieces of commentary on the issue. Both publications were also absorbed in the horrors associated with the rise of the Nazis at the time,<sup>316</sup> and reports of starving millions in the Ukraine seem to have flown under the radar. As for the *Manchester Guardian*, though it criticised Communist actions in the Soviet countryside honestly, it was preoccupied from this point on, when it came to news of the USSR, by its criticism of the British Government's diplomatic foolhardiness. And so its criticisms of the Soviet leaders were never absorbed fully into its paradigm. It

---

<sup>312</sup> *Daily Herald*, 19 April 1933, p. 8; the *Economist*, 22 April 1933, p. 847; and *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1933, p. 8.

<sup>313</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1933, p. 8.

<sup>314</sup> *Daily Herald*, 19 April 1933, p. 8.

<sup>315</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 7 January 1933, pp. 4-5, and 14 January 1933, p. 34, and 28 January 1933, p. 90.

<sup>316</sup> See the *Daily Herald*, March-April 1933; and the *New Statesman and Nation*, March-May 1933.

also printed articles by another Western journalist, W. H. Chamberlin, who wrote that 'wholesale starvation' was a myth, although food was short.<sup>317</sup>

The long-term effect of the right-wing campaigns against Soviet Communism up until 1933 was to heighten the Left's distrust of right-wing sources. The *Daily Worker* was able to mock the Right, calling its mouthpieces the 'evidence-makers', instead of really dealing with criticism of the Soviet Union. This label seemed increasingly deserved.<sup>318</sup> As Andrew J. Williams has written of the campaign against religious persecution in 1929-1930, the Right seemed to rely on atrocity-mongering in its criticism of the Soviet Union. Subsequent reports of Soviet transgressions were substantially weakened in the process. Williams quotes Kingsley Martin, who likened the religious persecution campaign to the atrocity stories of the First World War, which had the double effect of normalising atrocities and making people sceptical. Martin pointed out that, without evidence, the unlikely Communist crimes reported on the Right would be classed in entirely the same category as the myths during the war about German crimes. Williams writes, 'When further information about collectivisation came in, it had to fight the total disbelief formed in the Great War and reconfirmed in the early months of 1930.'<sup>319</sup>

Right-wing attacks also reinforced left-wing loyalty to the USSR. Most pro-Soviets accepted, to varying degrees, the principle that the Right would take any opportunity to make war on the Soviet Union. This belief was formed soon after the revolution and sustained by the attacks that came later. Radical publications, such as the *Daily Worker*, took this for granted.<sup>320</sup> However, the idea of capitalist hunger for war with the Soviet Union was given some credence by much less radical publications, such as the *Manchester Guardian*. As it reported during the campaign against dumping, 'it is a very probable hypothesis that this outcry against Soviet dumping is merely another excuse, like the outcry against religious persecution, for forming a political combination against

---

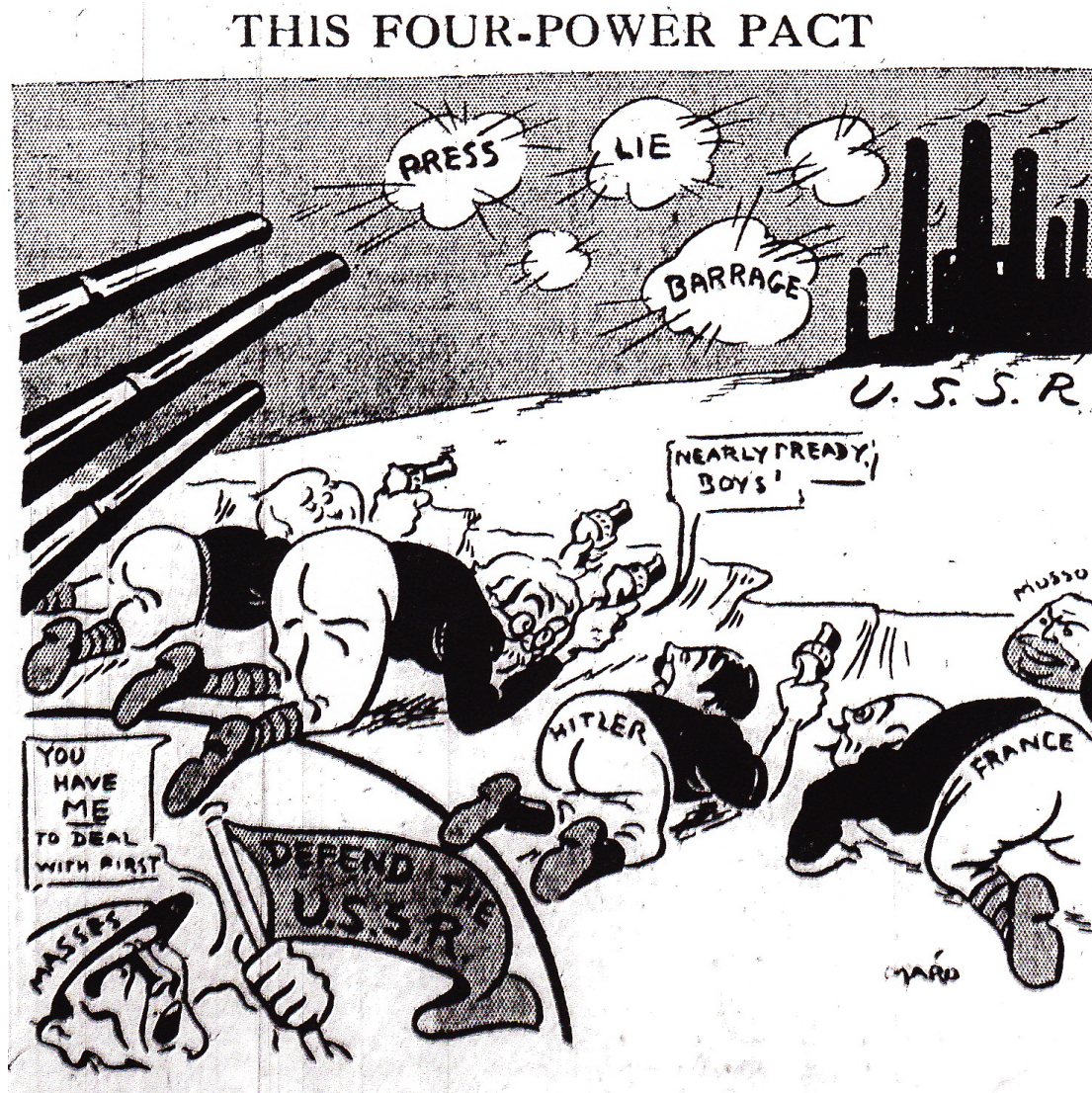
<sup>317</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19 October 1933, quoted on Gareth Jones: The Welsh Investigative Journalist <[http://www.garethjones.org/soviet\\_articles/soviet\\_tour\\_of\\_enquiry\\_1933.htm](http://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/soviet_tour_of_enquiry_1933.htm)> (12 March 2011)

<sup>318</sup> *Daily Worker*, 25 March 1933, p. 2.

<sup>319</sup> K. Martin, 'Public Opinion', *Political Quarterly*, January-March 1931, p. 120, quoted in Williams, pp. 109-110.

<sup>320</sup> For example, *Daily Worker*, 20 February 1930, p. 4.

Russia.<sup>321</sup> Convinced that the Soviet experiment was in real danger, a basic loyalty to the USSR developed, as pro-Soviets came to believe that the Soviet Union must be protected from reactionary attack. It must be given a chance to build its new system in which the left-wing movements of the world had deposited so much hope.



*Daily Worker* cartoon of 1933, showing the leaders of the capitalist world lined up against the Soviet Union.<sup>322</sup>

<sup>321</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, quoted in *Daily Worker*, 24 September 1930, p. 1.

<sup>322</sup> *Daily Worker*, 25 March 1933, p. 2.

## After the first Five Year Plan

The first half of the 1930s was a busy time for Soviet tourism, as interested pro-Soviets streamed in and out of the country, inspecting planning in action. Visitors to the USSR included many who had become or would become well-known supporters of the Soviet Union, and their visits entrenched them in an optimistic vision of the USSR that would sustain them in their pro-Sovietism, even during events that would seem to undermine this optimism. It also provided them with mental snapshots of life in the Soviet Union to take home and write about. These pro-Soviet visitors came with high expectations. Many had spent years before as socialists, or had supported the Soviet state since its inception. Seeing the land in which they had invested so much was an emotionally invigorating experience for them, comparable, at times, with a pilgrimage.<sup>323</sup>

Many of the writers who will be key to this chapter were among them, such as Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, who visited the Soviet Union in 1932 with the cartoonist David Low. He admitted, in his diary of the journey, ‘the whole thing excites me. I do not think I ever really hoped, though I have been a Socialist for so long, to see a State really trying to become Socialist.’<sup>324</sup> While these writers were not blind to some flaws of life in the Soviet Union, this enthusiasm remained, the freshness and uniqueness of the experience overriding doubts. Sidney Webb was brought to intense enthusiasm by his trip. Travel companion Barbara Drake described him visiting farms and factories: ‘Sidney would whisper to me, with the relish of the scientist whose theoretic proposition had stood the test of practical experiment: “See, see, it works, it works”’.<sup>325</sup> These were people who had a stake in what they saw and whose stake would increase with the appearance of Hitler; they were not necessarily objective.

To many of these visitors, it seemed obvious that the first Five Year Plan had paid off and that living conditions were much better. Despite the remaining deficiencies of life,

---

<sup>323</sup> P. Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928-1978* (New York, 1981), pp. 17-18. See also E. Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (London, 1938), pp. 429-430; and A. Stedman, ‘Western Visitors to Stalin’s Russia’, HIST 480 Research Essay, University of Canterbury, 2008.

<sup>324</sup> K. Martin and D. Low, *Low’s Russian Sketchbook* (London, 1932), p. 8.

<sup>325</sup> B. Drake, ‘The Webbs and Soviet Communism’, in *The Webbs and their Work*, ed. M. Cole (London, 1949), p. 227.

the people were enthusiastic and dedicated. Many British visitors went home and wrote books about their visits; as Martin ruefully commented, 'Books about Russia are two-a-penny on every bookshelf.'<sup>326</sup> The visitors described the joys of a simple, meaningful Russian life, although few of these sympathetic visitors stayed to sample these joys more permanently. Later, movements such as the Left Book Club published many articles and books on the improvement of life in the USSR and the broadening of opportunities for its people.<sup>327</sup> The pro-Soviets presented these changes as a closed case against capitalism. They were convinced that the Soviet Union had built herself a stable economic base, and could no longer be ignored in international affairs.

There were critics, however, even on the Left. Sir Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), toured the country in 1936. He was a much more incisive observer of the reality of working conditions in the Soviet Union, used by experience to looking for exploitation in a factory environment, and unwilling to shut down this faculty on arrival in the USSR. He saw much to admire in the successes of planning. However, he was disappointed to find 'bonus systems, piece-work, and the rest of the paraphernalia which characterizes the speeding up of operations in modern industry'—manoeuvres of which he had an 'instinctive dislike'.<sup>328</sup> Citrine's point of view, of course, was echoed by anti-Soviets on the Left, including Trotsky, who attacked the romanticisation of piecework as a Marxist ideal.<sup>329</sup>

British Communists and dedicated pro-Soviet socialists denied the thrust of these arguments. In private, some were also confused by the introduction of speeding-up in Russia. For instance, Harry Pollitt, leader of the CPGB, was bothered by the Stakhanovite movement, which aimed to increase the workers' output.<sup>330</sup> However, in public, Communists put on a united face against the critics of the Soviet Union. J. R. Campbell responded directly to Trotsky's argument by claiming that piecework in the Soviet Union was quite a different thing from piecework in capitalist countries. Likewise, the intention

---

<sup>326</sup> Martin and Low, p. 9.

<sup>327</sup> J. R. Campbell, *Soviet Policy and Its Critics* (London, 1939), p. 9.

<sup>328</sup> Citrine, pp. 410, 52.

<sup>329</sup> Trotsky, pp. 81-83.

<sup>330</sup> Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, p. 229.

of Stakhanovism was not to work people to the bone, but to encourage efficiency through teamwork.<sup>331</sup>

Non-Communist observers still moderated their thoughts on economic life in the Soviet Union in the light of failures of capitalism at home. The 'experimental' nature of planning appealed to many of these non-Communist sympathisers, who thought of Soviet failings as inevitable but temporary by-products of a great move by degrees towards a new kind of economy, an economy that would be aligned to the needs of all classes of society. Sir Bernard Pares expressed this view in 1937 when he said, 'Russia makes you think. What they are doing now is one of the most searching experiments.'<sup>332</sup> Even if mistakes were made, to attempt change was the thing. Such sweeping changes could not be made overnight.

### **Soviet internal affairs**

Until 1936, the approach of political changes within the Soviet Union filled sympathetic observers with hope. The 'Stalin Constitution', which was finalised in 1936, seemed to herald a new, more tolerant Soviet dictatorship. It established universal and equal suffrage for both workers and peasants, where previously workers' votes had been given a higher weighting. It also enshrined in law other equalities such as those of sex, religion and nationalities, as well as freedom of speech.<sup>333</sup> For pro-Soviets who disliked the dictatorial aspects of the Soviet Union, these were very welcome changes. H. N. Brailsford, a prominent columnist for *Reynolds News*, had always been a critical friend of the Soviet state. While for him the Russian Revolution was 'the greatest effort of the constructive human will' in history, he hated the repression that came with it.<sup>334</sup> Now, however, he breathed a deep sigh of relief. 'This [constitution] ends forever the superficial resemblances between the Fascist and Communist systems,' he wrote, pleased to see that Soviet Russia was taking steps forward in the political sphere as well as the economic sphere. 'This is political freedom on the solid foundation of social

---

<sup>331</sup> Campbell, pp. 97-98, 106.

<sup>332</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>333</sup> *For Peace and Friendship*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>334</sup> Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter*, pp. 142, 144, 166-167.

equality and the common ownership of the means of life.’<sup>335</sup> Like Brailsford, many on the moderate Left now held high hopes for the progress of democracy in the Soviet Union.

However, a number of people on the Left continued to criticise the absence of political freedom in the USSR. Sir Walter Citrine admitted much material improvement in the economic sphere in the Soviet Union, but he was much less optimistic about the political sphere:

In the realm of human liberty, many of the occurrences of the last few years have bewildered and horrified us. It is not only the continued use of censorship, the secret police, the concentration camp, prison and exile to which I refer, but the growing disregard for the sanctity of life itself.<sup>336</sup>

The French poet André Gide echoed this type of criticism. His small book *Return from the U.S.S.R.* caused a stir around the world. It expressed his deep disappointment at elements of Soviet life, such as the conformism promoted by the State. In his opinion, the people had been trained to be incapable of criticism. This was not socialism, said Gide, who had been one of the most distinguished and devoted pro-Soviets in Europe.<sup>337</sup>

Gide was one of a number for whom this disappointment became a more general disillusionment. This included writers like George Orwell. For Orwell, it was the Spanish Civil War that exposed the corruption of the Soviet leaders. After this moment of realisation, however, Orwell quickly developed a critical theory about the nature of Soviet Communism as a whole. It drew crucially on ideas of political freedom. ‘The essential act is the rejection of democracy—that is, of the underlying values of democracy; once you have decided upon that, Stalin—or at any rate someone *like* Stalin—is already on the way.’<sup>338</sup> For him, Stalin and his bureaucrats were ‘a new

---

<sup>335</sup> *Reynolds News*, 28 June 1936, quoted in F. M. Leventhal, ‘H. N. Brailsford and Russia: The Problem of Objectivity’, *Albion*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer 1973), p. 93.

<sup>336</sup> Citrine, pp. 410-412.

<sup>337</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937, p. 739.

<sup>338</sup> ‘Review: Russia Under Soviet Rule’, *New English Weekly*, 12 January 1939, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 381.



governing class' that had 'canalised and betrayed' the revolution.<sup>339</sup> It was the lack of political freedom that had caused the degeneration of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union.

A small number of Communists and non-Communists denied that there was a problem at all. A few argued that Soviet conformism was perfectly natural and did not signify any great problem. The Soviet people conformed to the party line because they agreed with it, and that was that.<sup>340</sup> *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* was one of the most important books that presented this view. It was written in 1935 by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the prominent Fabians. This huge two-volume work was an explanation of the entire Soviet political system and society. The Webbs concluded that, in the Soviet Union, the people personally took part in government. Therefore, it was truly a democracy. The Communist Party did control the administration, but this power did not extend to any demands 'enforceable by law on the ordinary citizen'. Stalin himself was not a dictator: 'We do not think that the Party is governed by the will of a single person; or that Stalin is the sort of person to claim or desire such a position.'<sup>341</sup>

However, the majority of the pro-Soviet Left admitted that the Soviet Union lacked some democratic attributes, and that this was unfortunate. These particular pro-Soviets sometimes included Communists or devoted fellow-travellers, and so their admissions were significant. Nevertheless, having conceded the lack of democracy in the Soviet Union, they diverted attention from the issue. The average citizen of Britain had no economic freedom, said writers like Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red' Dean of Canterbury. Without this, political democracy was 'illusory'.<sup>342</sup> By pointing to the world situation—fascism on the rise and the capitalists still hungry for war with the USSR—these pro-Soviets excused Soviet flaws by arguing that democracy was impractical at present in the Soviet Union. Socialism must be given a solid economic foundation before Stalin could afford to relax the political pressure on the people. The founders of the Left Book Club

---

<sup>339</sup> 'Review: The Freedom of the Streets', *New English Weekly*, 16 June 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 336.

<sup>340</sup> *Left News*, November 1938, p. 1043; and P. Sloan, *Soviet Democracy* (London, 1937), p. 102.

<sup>341</sup> S. Webb and B. Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (London, 1936), pp. ix, 427, 429-430, 432; and Northedge and Wells, pp. 164-165.

<sup>342</sup> Campbell, p. 131; and Johnson, p. 354.

supported this point of view. They saw repression in the USSR as an unfortunate necessity, a last resort that Stalin had been forced to take. Because fascism was bad and socialism was good, these apparently unpleasant features of Soviet life had to be excused.<sup>343</sup>

Pro-Soviets also diverted attention from Soviet failings by attacking the critics who exposed those failings in the first place. Even those who supported André Gide's right to criticise wrote critiques of his book, accusing him of 'expecting too much' from Soviet socialism.<sup>344</sup> Communists were at the forefront of the assault on Gide. Ivor Montagu, in the *Left News*, dismissed Gide's criticism, saying 'he is seduced by his own rhetoric.'<sup>345</sup> Non-Communists also joined the campaign against Gide. Lion Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937*, published by the Left Book Club, was written specifically to discredit him.<sup>346</sup> It was not only Gide who was attacked, but any one else on the Left who criticised the Soviet Union too publicly. This can be seen in the flood of letters to the *Daily Herald* condemning Citrine's first criticisms.<sup>347</sup> In this way the accusations of critics could become buried by attacks on their integrity or intellect.

### **The Moscow show trials**

The Soviet show trials of 1936 to 1938 were utterly mystifying to many from anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet paradigms alike, as the Russian Revolution began to swallow up its own leaders—Zinoviev, Kamenev, Piatakov, Radek, Sokolnikov, Bukharin, and many more. Mysteriously, they all confessed to collusion with the fascists and Trotsky abroad, and to terrorism, sabotage and murder within the USSR. This was an enormously challenging issue for pro-Soviets. As Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, 'when [the Soviet Government] began to heap obloquy upon, and to exterminate, its own, doubts were implanted and

---

<sup>343</sup> *Left News*, May 1937, pp. 364-365; and February 1939, p. 1153.

<sup>344</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937, p. 739.

<sup>345</sup> *Left News*, March 1937, pp. 281, 283.

<sup>346</sup> *Left News*, July 1937, p. 423.

<sup>347</sup> For example, *Daily Herald*, 6 July 1936, p. 10, and 8 July 1936, p. 15, and 9 July 1936, p. 17, and 10 July 1936, p. 16, and 11 July 1936, p. 10, and 13 July 1936, p. 10, and 14 July 1936, p. 14, et cetera.

admiration faltered.<sup>348</sup> At the same time, of course, the wider purges were displacing thousands to the labour camps or to execution,<sup>349</sup> but it was the very visible show trials that attracted the most attention within British public discourse of the Soviet Union, and provided the greatest challenge to pro-Soviet paradigms in these years.

For right-wing anti-Soviets, the show trials were in some ways a welcome relief. For several years now they had been confronted with Nazi Germany's expansion outside its borders, and with the Soviet Union's apparent economic and diplomatic stabilisation. As a result, the USSR was being presented by many pro-Soviets as Britain's natural ally against Nazi expansion—a very unattractive idea to most anti-Soviet commentators. However, now they were provided with another reason to reject Soviet diplomacy. Anti-Soviet commentators, from the British Union of Fascists (BUF) to the *Times*, agreed that the abject confessions of those on trial were not only nauseating but also false.<sup>350</sup> While anti-Soviets had little sympathy for the defendants, they did not believe the alleged crimes were at all likely.<sup>351</sup> How, it was asked, could pro-Soviets support such a state while attacking Nazi Germany? How could they suddenly condemn and denounce leaders whom they had previously exalted?<sup>352</sup>

To the majority of non-Communist pro-Soviets, the trials seemed absolutely incomprehensible. H. N. Brailsford, who became one of their foremost critics on the British Left, expressed this mystification when he wrote in 1937, 'It sounds like nightmare fiction. But to every detail all the prisoners confessed.'<sup>353</sup> It seemed impossible that tried and tested revolutionaries should confess so easily, when there was no other evidence. The confessions themselves appeared unnatural. Instead of defiantly justifying their actions, the defendants were more likely to confess remorsefully. Even more remarkable was the fact that these were men who had built the revolution with their own blood, sweat and tears. How could it be possible that they

---

<sup>348</sup> Muggeridge, p. 202.

<sup>349</sup> E. Mawdsley, *The Stalin years: The Soviet Union, 1929-1953* (Manchester and New York, 1998), pp. 100-101.

<sup>350</sup> *British Union Quarterly*, April 1937, p. 10; and the *Times*, 31 March 1937, p. 9.

<sup>351</sup> *British Union Quarterly*, April 1937, p. 10; *Daily Mail*, 26 August 1936, p. 11; *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1938, p. 12; *English Review*, October 1936, p. 361; and de Basily (1938), p. 169.

<sup>352</sup> *Daily Mail*, 26 August 1936, p. 10.

<sup>353</sup> *Reynolds News*, 7 February 1937, p. 4.

had turned on it? Brailsford, again, captured the fundamental problem of the show trials for the Left, writing, 'In one Judas among every 12 apostles it is easy to believe. But when there are 11 Judases and only one loyal apostle, the Church is unlikely to thrive.'<sup>354</sup>

Historians have tended to be very critical of the way in which non-Communist pro-Soviets dealt with the challenge of the purges and show trials. They have emphasised that the British Left was blind to the reality of events in the Soviet Union, refusing to believe that anything could be wrong in the socialist paradise. David Caute, for example, thinks that 'for the most part, the chorus of assent was deafening'. While he admits that 'a few voices were raised in protest', he claims they were 'drowned by the cohorts of approval'.<sup>355</sup> Hugo Dewar criticises the *New Statesman and Nation*, in particular, for bowing to the Communist line. They were '[remote] from reality', and '[indifferent] to the moral issues' of the trials. Furthermore, 'this type of confusion and refusal to face facts dominated the thinking of many left-wing intellectuals and the left wing of the labour movement'.<sup>356</sup> More generally, F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells also present the pro-Soviet observers as willfully blind, 'shutting their eyes to the totalitarian features of the country they depicted as a paradise'.<sup>357</sup> Jonathan Davis echoes this, writing that many in the Labour movement turned 'a blind eye to the more disturbing stories that emerged from the USSR'.<sup>358</sup>

It is true that some people consciously chose not to criticise the show trials, and that a few even praised them as an example of good judicial procedure. This was normal among Communists. 'History can record few more revolting characters than this Zinoviev gang of assassins,' declared the *Daily Worker*. 'They are a "festering, cankering sore", and we echo fervently the workers' verdict: Shoot the Reptiles!'<sup>359</sup> Communists generally ignored or denied the claims of critics by revising history, updating their revisions with each new arrest. These people were not really 'old Bolsheviks' at all, and unlike Stalin they had not at all times and at all points in their lives been completely

---

<sup>354</sup> *Reynolds News*, 7 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>355</sup> Caute, *Fellow-Travellers*, pp. 126, 130.

<sup>356</sup> Dewar.

<sup>357</sup> Northedge and Wells, p. 241.

<sup>358</sup> Corthorn and Davis, p. 84.

<sup>359</sup> *Daily Worker*, 24 August 1936, p. 4.

dedicated to Lenin.<sup>360</sup> And even if the defendants in the trials could be seen as revolutionaries of an inferior sort, their fall from true socialism was sad, but the degeneration of revolutionaries was not unheard of—witness the French Revolution.<sup>361</sup>

Some left-wing non-Communists and even some observers not normally identified with the Left came to similar conclusions about the trials. Two British lawyers, D. N. Pritt and Dudley Collard, were especially useful to the Communists. They had attended the 1936 trial and the 1937 trial respectively, and written short books and articles on the subject. Both Pritt and Collard agreed that confessions were a perfectly adequate form of evidence, and that the trials followed normal procedure. Furthermore, it was impossible for so many people to confess to such a complicated tale, over days of cross-examining, if it were untrue. The confessions were too convincing and consistent. 'Months of rehearsal by the most competent actors could not have enabled false participants in such a contest to last ten minutes,' wrote Pritt.<sup>362</sup> A few others came to similar conclusions. Sir Bernard Pares, for example, was present at the 1936 trial, and concluded that the defendants were guilty without a doubt, while a correspondent from the anti-Soviet *Observer* accepted the veracity of the trials.<sup>363</sup>

Others chose to ignore the trials as much as possible. In private, some British Communists were disturbed by the purges, especially when some of their own were arrested in Moscow. Harry Pollitt even intervened on behalf of a British Communist called Rose Cohen, unsuccessfully.<sup>364</sup> However, no hint of this appeared in public. The Left Book Club refused to publish anything that made any strong criticisms of the Soviet Union. Victor Gollancz insisted that H. N. Brailsford tone down his criticism in a book that was about to be published, and cancelled his request for another book by Brailsford.<sup>365</sup> The only attention the Left Book Club actually paid to this subject was relentlessly pro-Soviet, publishing Dudley Collard's book about the 1937 trial, as well as the Communist J. R. Campbell's indictment of the Soviet Union's critics.

---

<sup>360</sup> *Daily Worker*, 29 January 1937, p. 4.

<sup>361</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1937, p. 20.

<sup>362</sup> D. Collard, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others* (London, 1937), pp. 56, 82; and D. N. Pritt, *The Zinoviev Trial* (London, 1936), pp. 5, 13.

<sup>363</sup> *Spectator*, 18 September 1936, and *Observer*, 23 August 1936, quoted in Dewar.

<sup>364</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party and Moscow*, pp. 238, 240-241.

<sup>365</sup> Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter*, pp. 248-249.

Therefore, it is true that a portion of the Left chose to support the show trials publicly, or to ignore them. It would be easy to accept such people as representative, especially given the comments of a few contemporary anti-Stalinists, like Malcolm Muggeridge and George Orwell. Orwell wrote that 'the huge tribe' of pro-Soviets in Britain found it very 'easy to condone' the purges and show trials.<sup>366</sup> Muggeridge made a similar generalisation, writing in 1940 that pro-Soviets 'mostly refrained from giving any public expression to the doubts which had assailed them' during the trials.<sup>367</sup> These comments appear to be trusted implicitly by historians such as Cauter or Northedge and Wells.

In fact, as historian Paul Corthorn has more recently shown, this is an extremely lopsided view of the British left-wing response to the purges. Corthorn writes, 'the purges were fiercely criticized across a representative range of Labour and Left opinion.' For many, 'the purges brought about a public admittance that Soviet communism, in its Stalinist guise at least, was like fascism and implied cruel repression, ruthless dictatorship, and the cult of the leader.'<sup>368</sup> It is clear from a study of the primary sources that the majority of pro-Soviets across the political spectrum by no means ignored the negative implications of the show trials, while a large number criticised Stalin's crimes in the USSR quite vociferously. As shown previously, the British Right contributed its own criticism to the discussion, but the most incisive criticism on this subject came from the Left.

Most non-Communist pro-Soviets made it clear from the beginning that something was very wrong in the land in which they had placed such hopes, despite their confusion about what was happening and why. They attacked the confessions, which seemed fundamentally unreliable. Far from following the Communist line, of which Dewar has accused him, Kingsley Martin of the *New Statesman* said immediately that the trials were 'wholly unconvincing'.<sup>369</sup> Without corroborative evidence or independent

---

<sup>366</sup> 'Inside the Whale', *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 1940, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 517.

<sup>367</sup> Muggeridge, p. 203.

<sup>368</sup> P. Corthorn, 'Labour, the Left, and the Stalinist Purges of the Late 1930s', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2005), pp. 181, 207.

<sup>369</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 29 August 1936, p. 274.

witnesses, there was no way of knowing what was true or what was false.<sup>370</sup> Critics poked holes in the confessions fairly easily, exposing flaws and contradictions. A famous example of this was the claim of one defendant that he had conspired with Trotsky in a meeting at the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen. The international press pointed out that this hotel no longer existed.<sup>371</sup> The charges themselves were most difficult to swallow. Many pro-Soviets could not accept that there were so many traitors among the old Bolsheviks, many of whom were well-known in Britain. Grigory Sokolnikov, for instance, had been the Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain. It was inconceivable to those who had befriended the Sokolnikov family while they were in London that such devoted socialists should betray the Soviet Union.<sup>372</sup>

For these critics, the confessions were impossible to accept. However, they were also difficult to reject, because they appeared completely inexplicable. Nobody knew why the defendants confessed. Right-wingers considered the possibility of hypnotism, truth drugs or torture. They also reminded newspaper readers of the novels of Dostoevsky, which showed that Russians were fatalists, who enjoyed making extravagantly false confessions.<sup>373</sup> While left-wing critics generally avoided suggestions of truth drugs or fatalism, some agreed that torture was likely. *Fight*, paper of the anti-Stalinist Revolutionary Socialist League, made this suggestion outright, while the *Manchester Guardian* hinted at it.<sup>374</sup> And yet there seemed to be no physical evidence of torture. It was also difficult to believe that so many prisoners of tough revolutionary stock would succumb to it.<sup>375</sup> Even the *Daily Mail* had to admit that the prisoners 'appear before the judges in full apparent possession of their faculties'.<sup>376</sup> Besides, each defendant made long, involved confessions which seemed basically consistent, while they each behaved differently in court, precluding any single explanation. Understanding, then, was

---

<sup>370</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 307.

<sup>371</sup> *Reynolds News*, 7 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>372</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937, p. 148; and *Reynolds News*, 7 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>373</sup> *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1937, p. 10; 27 January 1937, p. 10; and the *Economist*, 22 August 1936, p. 344.

<sup>374</sup> *Fight*, April 1938, p. 4; and *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1938, p. 8.

<sup>375</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 26 December 1936, p. 1054.

<sup>376</sup> *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1938, p. 12.

doomed to failure. As Kingsley Martin wrote, none of the explanations on offer seemed 'even plausible'.<sup>377</sup>

Nevertheless, the confusion attending the confessions did not stop the pro-Soviet Left from criticising them. The *Daily Herald*, for instance, described itself as 'sick at heart', whether the confessions were true or false.<sup>378</sup> There seemed to be a choice between two very unattractive realities. If the confessions were false, the Soviet state had committed a terrible crime. However, if the confessions were true, this presented a horrific picture in itself. Francis Williams, editor of the *Daily Herald*, expressed this in 1937:

Whichever view is taken, Communism both as a theory and a practice is hideously scarred by the trial. It must be an intense and repressive dictatorship which drives the Old Bolshevik Opposition into treason, assassination and Fascism. Or, alternatively, it must be a brutal and vindictive dictatorship which executes or imprisons Old Bolsheviks because they disagree with Stalin.<sup>379</sup>

Dictatorship, said Brailsford, had either 'corrupted the entire Bolshevik Guard', or it had 'corrupted Stalin himself'.<sup>380</sup> This was a very challenging dichotomy to deal with.

The trials and purges made the Soviet Union look weak, full of strife, and made a mockery of the popular front's call for collective security with the USSR. Who would make an alliance with a state that had just executed eight of its top military experts?<sup>381</sup> In a world where enemies of socialism were everywhere, Stalin had provided the fascists and other anti-Soviets with a 'priceless propagandist weapon', in the words of the *New Statesman and Nation*.<sup>382</sup> The anti-Soviet *Times*, for example, admitted that the Soviet Union seemed to have been making 'pleasing strides in social progress', as well as

---

<sup>377</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 307.

<sup>378</sup> *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1936, p. 8.

<sup>379</sup> *Daily Herald*, 30 January 1937, p. 8.

<sup>380</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 March 1938, p. 4.

<sup>381</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 June 1937, p. 992.

<sup>382</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937, p. 148.



stabilising economically. Now, however, 'fresh doubts have arisen.'<sup>383</sup> Pro-Soviet critics held out these examples to uncritical pro-Soviets and to Stalin, begging them to think of the effect of the trials on worldwide public opinion. As the *Manchester Guardian* put it, 'the Bolshevik bogey, who haunts Lord Rothermere's dreams, will put on substance if the Soviet State gives an exhibition in full character.'<sup>384</sup>

Therefore, for a large number of pro-Soviets, the implications of each trial were extremely grim, and a growing proportion of the Left began to describe the show trials as a travesty of socialism. Francis Williams was weary of it all, by 1938. 'Understanding is impossible. There remains horror at the deed, pity for the victims, and dismay at the condition of the Soviet Union after twenty years of Soviet rule.'<sup>385</sup> Others, however, were extremely angry. The ILP had been sending appeals to Stalin since 1936, pleading with him to see the effect the trials were having on the Soviet Union's reputation. By the time of the third show trial, however, their appeals were filled less with pleas and more with angry accusations.<sup>386</sup> H. N. Brailsford also grew more scornful. While in 1936 his tone was mostly sad,<sup>387</sup> by 1938 he too was bitter.

Stalin has now conclusively demonstrated his paradoxical theory of the Soviet revolution. The greatest constructive effort in human history was the work of leaders who were, with two exceptions, 'carrion'.<sup>388</sup>

For these people, their own criticism was so intense that the viability of their general pro-Sovietism was under threat.

It is clear that criticism was vocal and widespread among prominent pro-Soviet writers and newspapers, who were backed up by increasing numbers of letter-writers.<sup>389</sup> According to Paul Corthorn, this shows that the trials forced most of the critics to reject

---

<sup>383</sup> The *Times*, 12 November 1936, p. 15.

<sup>384</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1936, p. 8.

<sup>385</sup> *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1938, p. 10.

<sup>386</sup> *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1936, p. 2; 2 March 1938, p. 2; and *Daily Mail*, 10 March 1938, p. 9.

<sup>387</sup> He wrote, for example, 'It is worse than a defeat when we must read the news from Moscow with shame'. *Reynolds News*, 30 August 1936, p. 4.

<sup>388</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 March 1938, p. 4.

<sup>389</sup> See, for example, *Reynolds News*, 13 March 1938, p. 4; and 20 March 1938, p. 8.

their positive view of the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, losing their pro-Soviet identity. He writes that these critics began to compare the Soviet internal regime to the Nazi internal regime, revising all past ideas of Soviet methods. Although they continued to support the Soviet Union's foreign policy, this was only because the threat of Hitler made this strategically necessary for the defence of Britain. And so the critics on the Left now presented the Soviet Union as a 'strategic—rather than an ideological—ally'. They began to define themselves in terms of greater 'hostility' and 'ambiguity' towards the USSR than before. 'This surely testifies to the reduced importance of the Soviet Union in the Labour left's identity.'<sup>390</sup>

This argument assumes that, because criticism was fierce, disenchantment followed as a matter of course. In reality, most of the major critics did not become anti-Soviet or even anti-Stalinist. The minority who became disillusioned with Soviet Communism around this time were usually those who were also critical of Communist activities in Spain. Often these people had become disillusioned because of Spain first, and then added the show trials to their list of Stalin's crimes.<sup>391</sup> An exception is Leonard Woolf, for whom it was the show trials that destroyed his faith in the Soviet Union.<sup>392</sup> The Labour Party leadership and Francis Williams were also permanently disillusioned with Soviet internal policy by the trials,<sup>393</sup> but the majority of those who criticised found ways to cope, and remained essentially pro-Soviet, ideologically supportive of Soviet Communism in *both* its internal and foreign policies. Even Brailsford, after making his most cutting criticisms of the trials, went on to find excuses for them.<sup>394</sup> Despite the storm of criticism during the trials, the actual results in pro-Soviet commitment to the Soviet Union were much less dramatic. Perhaps, in focusing on who criticised and who did not, historians have ignored other questions. It may be more pertinent to ask how and why almost all of these people, regardless of their criticism, swallowed their doubts.

---

<sup>390</sup> Corthorn, 'Labour, the Left', pp. 204-207; and Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 191, 198, 206, 212-213. Quotes from *In the Shadow*: pp. 198, 212, 206.

<sup>391</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 6, 206, 214.

<sup>392</sup> Leventhal, 'Leonard Woolf and Kingsley Martin', p. 286.

<sup>393</sup> Williams, p. 239.

<sup>394</sup> *Reynolds News*, 13 March 1938, p. 4.

To understand how the critics coped, it is important to consider the context for the trials. The pressure of the rise of fascism at the time was intense, and almost cannot be overplayed, given the Left's commitment to anti-fascism. The Spanish Civil War was well underway at the time of the first trial, in 1936. A symbol for the Left of the larger fight between fascism and democracy, it dominated their thoughts and fears. At the same time, at home, the BUF demonstrated on the streets of London, and socialists demonstrated in reaction, leading to the 'Battle of Cable Street'.<sup>395</sup> During the 1937 trial, the negotiations between the Communists, the ILP and the Socialist League for a Unity Campaign against fascism were at their most crucial stage. At the time of the 1938 trial, Hitler was taking over Austria, and the Soviet Union seemed the only country prepared to make a stand against him. During the rest of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, Hitler's incremental steps towards war tended to overshadow what had just happened in the USSR.

These events strongly influenced the British pro-Soviets in their response to the trials. They had a very realistic fear of their words of criticism being used to stir up war against the USSR instead of Nazi Germany. Critics emphasised their horror when their criticisms were taken and used by anti-Soviets in Britain or the fascists abroad.<sup>396</sup> And, in comparison to the horrors of fascism, Soviet misdeeds looked less important. As John Lewis of the Left Book Club admitted in 1970, the Club had presented the show trials in a way that was 'frankly misleading'. However, he defended its actions by claiming that many of the Club's leaders were genuinely 'disturbed' by the trials but decided to downplay their doubts for the sake of the anti-fascist cause.<sup>397</sup> The events that followed show just how important that cause was and how correct the Left was to fear fascism. As Andrew J. Williams writes, it must not 'be forgotten that the realities of Europe, Hitler, Mussolini et al. required a much stronger stomach than anything in Europe since

---

<sup>395</sup> T. P. Linehan, 'Fascist Perceptions of Cable Street', in *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society*, ed. T. Kushner and N. Valman (London, 2000), p. 23; and Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, p. 234.

<sup>396</sup> See, for example, *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 308; and *Reynolds News*, 20 March 1938, p. 8.

<sup>397</sup> Lewis, *Left Book Club*, p. 112.

1953'. To attack those who did not immediately excommunicate the Soviet Union because of the trials 'gives the inevitable impression of cats biting lions' ankles'.<sup>398</sup>

Furthermore, the Communists attacked anyone who dared to criticise the trials. According to one letter-writer, the *Daily Herald* was as bad as capitalist newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, or even as bad as Nazi newspapers.<sup>399</sup> H. N. Brailsford was singled out for the attack, in response to his biting criticism in the columns of *Reynolds News*. Hundreds of letters were written to the paper, many of which denounced him and his arguments.<sup>400</sup> The official Communist publications were even more vicious, setting out to discredit his past and question the authenticity of his socialism.<sup>401</sup> For those who were working for a popular front with the Communists against fascism, this certainly held them back, as criticism seemed certain to destroy all their hard work. Even the ILP, which was already critical of events in Spain and the Soviet Union, held back its criticism at the height of negotiations for the Unity Campaign, during the 1937 trial.<sup>402</sup> The threat of instant recrimination was daunting, and the prospect of seeing oneself quoted in the *Daily Mail* very unattractive. As Victor Gollancz wrote later, explaining the Left Book Club's comparative silence on the subject of the show trials:

To create a public opinion friendly to the Soviet Union was essential to success. ... This public opinion had to be created in face of a constant stream of propaganda that attacked the bad things in Russia without mentioning the good. ... And so there was a temptation, and the temptation grew, to praise the good things without mentioning the bad. ... This tendency was increased by the co-operation with communists; first because any fundamental criticism of Russia would have snapped the links immediately—to express the smallest doubts was to stamp one as 'an enemy of the Soviet Union'. ... It was in the matter of the Trials that the inner conflict was greatest. ... But every Tycoon in Britain was using that trial to stir up hatred of Russia, because, twenty-three years ago, she had abolished the

---

<sup>398</sup> Williams, p. 242.

<sup>399</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 314.

<sup>400</sup> *Reynolds News*, 14 February 1937, p. 12; 13 March 1938, p. 4; and 20 March 1938, p. 8.

<sup>401</sup> *Daily Worker*, 9 March 1938, p. 2; 10 March 1938, p. 2; 12 March 1938, p. 2; and 14 March 1938, p. 4; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 July 1937, quoted in Leventhal, 'Brailsford and Russia', p. 95.

<sup>402</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, p. 136.

exploitation of man by money. ... [So] I published only books that justified the trials, and sent the socialist criticisms of them elsewhere.<sup>403</sup>

These were effective justifications, holding back criticism and providing the critics with very good reasons to come to terms with the trials.

Therefore, the desire to come to terms with criticism was strong, even among those who criticised loudly. Since this desire was so great, the inexplicability of the trials made it easier to cope with them. In the end, many critics chose to criticise these events only partially. Most eventually assumed that there was a basic 'substratum of truth' to the trials, even if some mistakes had been made, as the *Manchester Guardian* suggested.<sup>404</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* took a similar approach, criticising only individual aspects of the trials by 1938.<sup>405</sup> Even Brailsford came to the point of making excuses for the trials. Even at his most critical, he attempted to point the finger not at the Soviet system in general, but at the OGPU, the Soviet secret police, which 'is not a Socialist institution. It is the most evil legacy of Tsardom.' This implied that it was not the socialist state but pre-socialist survivals that were responsible for the trials.<sup>406</sup> This way of dealing with the challenge allowed these critics to restrict themselves to partial criticism, or revising only a few features of the pro-Soviet paradigm, and avoiding the need for a complete break from it.

There may also have been a means of distraction from criticism of Stalin in criticising local Communists. Many of the critics were appalled by the CPGB's bloodthirsty condemnations of the victims of the trials, of men who had once been their heroes. As the *Daily Herald* put it, 'they fling their second hand scurrilities at men under sentence of death, because they hope by their screaming to please Stalin.'<sup>407</sup> The left-wing critics were also angered by the Communist attack on British critics, and they vigorously

---

<sup>403</sup> V. Gollancz (ed.), *The Betrayal of the Left* (London, 1941), pp. 296-297.

<sup>404</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1938, p. 8.

<sup>405</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 307; and 12 March 1938, p. 394.

<sup>406</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 March 1938, p. 4; and 13 March 1938, p. 4.

<sup>407</sup> *Daily Herald*, 25 August 1936, p. 8.

defended people like Brailsford, railing against the CPGB's methods.<sup>408</sup> This did not divert attention from the trials, but there may have been some comfort for the critics, in venting their own spleen on the local Communists. This may have relieved the feelings of anger that much of the Left felt at the trials, making it easier to deal more calmly with their criticism of Soviet methods.

Many of these critics had attacked Communist methods since the beginning of the Soviet state. They had a background of defending the USSR's socialism while rejecting certain features of its Communism and its leaders' methods. Long-term supporters like Brailsford saw themselves as bound by duty to hold the Soviet Union to the highest standards of socialism, and so criticism did not have to mean abandonment of the Soviet Union, but could be rationalised as continued care for it. Other supporters such as the *Manchester Guardian* were not politically committed in the same way, but they were, all the same, committed anti-fascists who believed that the Soviet Union was essentially democratic, and on their side. In the end, even if the critics revised aspects of their pro-Sovietism, they managed to reaffirm the USSR's basic socialist foundation or its position as an important opponent of fascism. Even as he criticised, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* explained that 'in spite of all that has happened, the Soviet Union still stands for certain ideals we do not like to abandon.'<sup>409</sup> H. N. Brailsford and Kingsley Martin agreed. The 'Moscow trial must not shake our faith in Russia', one of Brailsford's headlines declared, while Martin reminded his readers that nothing he had just said in criticism changed the fact that the Soviet Union was a peaceful, socialist, anti-fascist country.<sup>410</sup> This was not disillusionment, as Corthorn argues. But neither was it blind ignorance of Soviet crimes. It was a complex response, influenced by a large number of events and considerations other than the show trials themselves, and not least by a desire among all the pro-Soviets involved to be wrong in their doubts about socialism in the USSR.

---

<sup>408</sup> Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 48-49; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 July 1937, p. 106-107, quoted in P. Deli, 'The Image of the Russian Purges in the Daily Herald and the New Statesman', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20, no. 2, Working-Class and Left-wing Politics (April 1985), p. 276.

<sup>409</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1938, p. 8.

<sup>410</sup> *Reynolds News*, 7 February 1937, p. 4; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 308.

## The rise of Nazism

Hitler's rise to power in Germany in early 1933 shocked the pro-Soviet Left. The racism, militarism and repression that characterised the Nazi regime were horrifying from the very beginning.<sup>411</sup> At first, socialists did not necessarily apprehend the danger of Hitler to the outside world. Many regarded fascism as simply an alternative means of propping up capitalism, a moral equivalent of British-style democracy, even if fascism was more obviously unpleasant. Even Communists initially thought that the Nazis were only a symptom of the fatal illness of capitalism, as imperialism, in its dying throes, resorted to desperate measures in order to cling to power. This point of view implied that the Nazis could only be a short-term development.<sup>412</sup> However, as the fascists began expanding into other territories, left-wing public discourse began to be characterised by a new sense of urgency. The Italian seizure of Abyssinia was followed by fascist excursions into the Rhineland, Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Gradually, the pro-Soviet Left came to accept that the successful conquest of fascism over the British form of democracy would be catastrophic for the cause of socialism in Britain. Making the threat even more potent were Hitler's well-documented intentions towards the Soviet Union. As a result, most pro-Soviets accepted the aims of Litvinov's diplomacy and the change in the Comintern line from 'Class Against Class' to popular fronts. As the danger grew more overwhelming, the Soviet Union seemed to be the only major power standing firmly against fascist aggression, and the Left clung even more closely to pro-Sovietism.

The Spanish Civil War was a key point in the progression of the Left's anti-fascism. It aroused passionate support for the Spanish Republic, and hatred of the militarists and fascists who were seeking to overthrow it. For H. N. Brailsford, this was the moment which brought clarity. Fascism must be resisted:

Italy has taken Malaga. One of the Duce's cruisers has landed a thousand men in its harbour. His aviators have pursued the women and children of this town, mowing down the refugees who fled from his infantry and the Moors. This is no longer a

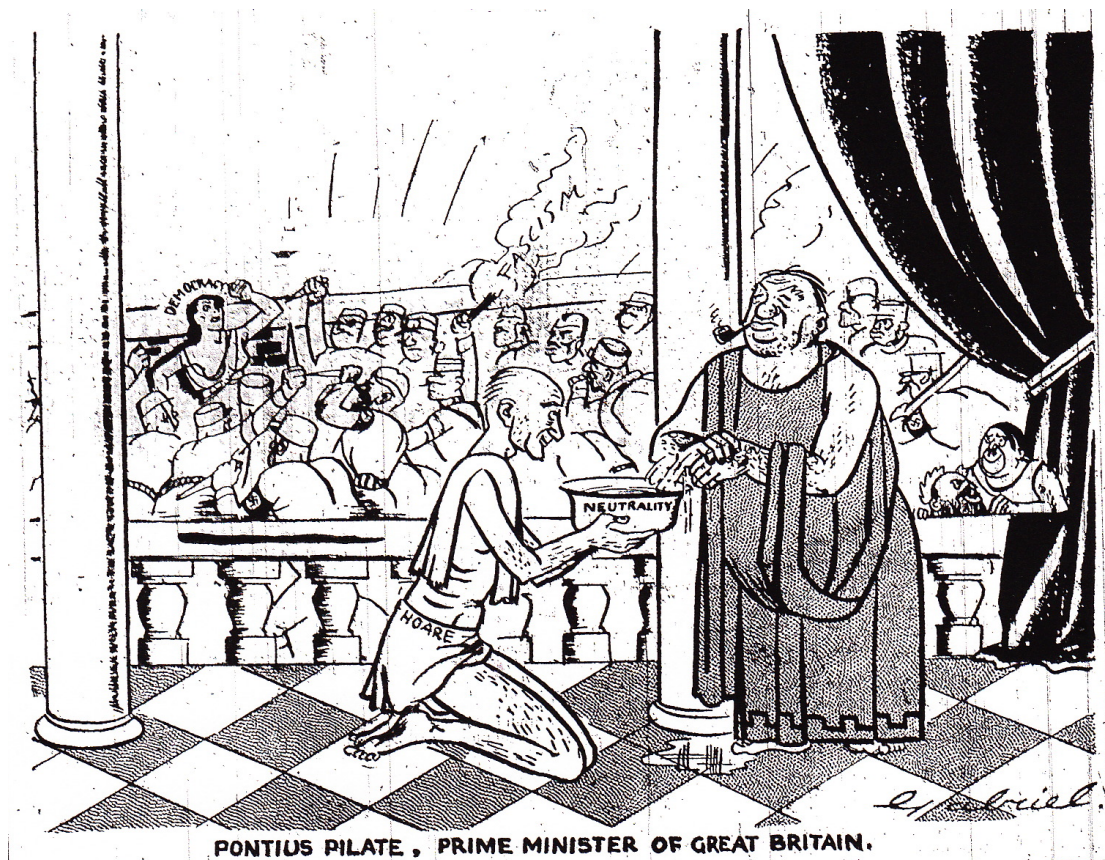
---

<sup>411</sup> Griffiths, p. 194; and Jupp, p. 14.

<sup>412</sup> R. P. Dutt, *World Politics 1918-1936* (London, 1936), p. 296; and Neavill, p. 205.

Spanish Civil War; it is a war of Fascism and Democracy, and in this international class war the British Government stands professedly neutral.<sup>413</sup>

The National Government's insistence on remaining resolutely neutral meant that Britain took no action against Hitler and Mussolini's intervention, but at the same time prevented the Spanish Government from receiving supplies and arms. For the British Left, this was a bitter disappointment.<sup>414</sup> Over two thousand British volunteers went to Spain to fight, a quarter of whom died in battle for the cause of Spanish democracy.<sup>415</sup>



A cartoon in the *Daily Worker*, showing Pontius Pilate washing his hands in the neutrality pact whilst Democracy perishes outside at the hands of fascism.<sup>416</sup>

<sup>413</sup> *Reynolds News*, 21 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>414</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*; and 'Review: Searchlight on Spain', *New English Weekly*, 21 July 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, p. 344.

<sup>415</sup> R. Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939* (New York, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>416</sup> *Daily Worker*, 24 August 1936, p. 5.



The Soviet Union, unlike Britain, intervened in the Spanish Civil War, sending troops and supplies to support the Spanish Government.<sup>417</sup> This cemented the Soviet Union's reputation among pro-Soviets and anti-fascists as a country that would take necessary action against the fascists. It produced gratitude, as well as sustaining the belief among socialists that the Soviet Union must be defended at all times. Even those who were disposed to criticise questionable events within the USSR, such as members of the ILP, made a conscious decision at first to withhold their criticism while it was the only country providing help for the desperate Spanish Government.<sup>418</sup>

The British Right, by contrast, seemed blind to the danger of Italian and German intervention in Spain. The atrocity-mongering of the more extreme anti-Soviet papers was particularly galling for pro-Soviets. 'The Rothermere press has outdone its own disgusting record,' reported the *New Statesman and Nation*. Its tendency to report the most fantastic lies as fact was a disgrace to journalism.<sup>419</sup> This was not only disgusting but unsettling. The *Manchester Guardian* was particularly concerned:

Democracy in Europe has its back to the wall; dictatorship is in the ascendant. But when a clash comes between the two forces a considerable part of the British press is found to be avowedly pro-Fascist, large sections of Conservative opinion are found cheering a militarist movement supported by the intrigues of the Fascist Powers, and the Government is halting. It is the revelation of the existence of this temper that is disquieting. For it clearly goes deeper than the ravings of one press lord.<sup>420</sup>

The Spanish Civil War accentuated the divisions in British society, reinforcing again the Left's distrust of the Right. The 'ravings' of the right-wing press were either so infuriating or so saddening that in pro-Soviet eyes they overshadowed any criticism of Soviet actions in Spain.

---

<sup>417</sup> Baxell, p. 3; and Caute, *Fellow-Travellers*, p. 180.

<sup>418</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>419</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 29 August 1936, p. 274.

<sup>420</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 August 1936, p. 8.

As the 1930s continued, the threat of fascism escalated, all around Europe. The situation in Germany itself was equally worrying.<sup>421</sup> Pro-Soviets believed they had to take action. Many turned to the idea of popular fronts as a way to force collective security with the Soviet Union onto the government's agenda. Communists were a major part of this movement. Harry Pollitt, leader of the CPGB, appealed to the emotions of a wider range of listeners than normal. 'We dare not wait until war comes. We dare not wait until democratic institutions have been overthrown. We have to unite to prevent war and Fascism.'<sup>422</sup> Members of the popular fronts believed that, if the Left pooled its voting power, the current Government would be forced to seek collective security or be replaced. If a combination of strong yet peaceful states—Britain, France, the Soviet Union and others—faced Hitler down, he would be unable to proceed with further aggression.<sup>423</sup>

Despite this desire for unity of action, there was more than one idea on how a popular front should be attempted. The aim of the Unity Campaign, launched in 1937, was to form a united front of the working-class parties. Both the ILP and the Socialist League, a small group within the Labour Party, were opposed to going any further at this point, rejecting calls for a popular front which involved non-socialists. Together with the CPGB, they wanted to form an official combination with the Labour Party.<sup>424</sup> However, prominent voices called for a more general popular front. G. D. H. Cole, a socialist academic, was typical of many intellectuals when he said 'I am less concerned about the need for passing Socialist measures in the immediate future than about the need for saving democracy from total eclipse.' For Cole, minor disagreements between democratically-minded groups were insignificant. 'The far more immediate and important task' was 'resisting Fascist aggression'.<sup>425</sup> This 'people's front', therefore, was to take all the support it could get, even from anti-fascists outside the working class.

---

<sup>421</sup> Gannon, pp. 119-20, 226-228.

<sup>422</sup> *Daily Worker*, 21 July 1936, p. 4.

<sup>423</sup> *Daily Worker*, 22 August 1936, p. 4; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 January 1937, p. 4 and 29 August 1936, p. 274.

<sup>424</sup> *New Leader*, 15 January 1937, p. 1.

<sup>425</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *The People's Front* (London, 1937), pp. 15, 34.

One of the most famous movements created in association with this was the Left Book Club. It was founded in 1936 for the propagation of Left ideas in affordable books, which would encourage a popular front against fascism and collective security with the Soviet Union. Victor Gollancz, a publisher, was its creator, and he selected the Club's books with the help of John Strachey and Harold Laski. He explained his motivation for starting the Club:

Before, it had been a question of enlightening people, in a general sort of way, about the causes of the war: now it was a question of preventing a war that was just around the corner.<sup>426</sup>

The Left Book Club gained a membership of 40,000 within a year, and 57,000 by 1939. It organised mass rallies around the country, and circulated large numbers of leaflets at crucial moments. Its regular newsletter, *Left News*, became an influential commentator on current events.<sup>427</sup>

As events progressed into 1938, those on the popular front campaigned even more furiously in a desperate attempt to win public and official support, but Britain's leaders showed no sign of recognising the threat posed by Hitler to the world. The Munich Agreement that carved up Czechoslovakia was particularly worrying.<sup>428</sup> During the negotiations, the situation was not necessarily seen as hopeless—'peace can still be preserved'—but, as the *News Chronicle* continued, 'it calls for the most resolute action by the British Government working in the closest agreement with Czechoslovakia itself and with France and Russia; and there is not a moment to be lost.'<sup>429</sup> Another writer in the same newspaper set up a chain letter which resulted in thousands of letters being sent to the Government calling for 'an immediate consultation between Great Britain, France, and Soviet Russia'.<sup>430</sup> The Left Book Club, likewise, had distributed during the crisis two million copies of a leaflet calling for the Soviet Union's inclusion in an attempt

---

<sup>426</sup> V. Gollancz, *More for Timothy*, pp. 352-353, quoted in Neavill, p. 199.

<sup>427</sup> Jupp, p. 115; Caute, *Fellow-Travellers*, pp. 171-173; Lewis, *Left Book Club*, p. 20; Neavill, pp. 197-198, 205-206, 208; and Northedge and Wells, pp. 169-170.

<sup>428</sup> Gannon, pp. 107-108, 136-137, 202-204, 209, 226; and Gedye, chapter 16.

<sup>429</sup> *News Chronicle*, 14 September 1938, p. 10, quoted in Gannon, p. 209.

<sup>430</sup> *News Chronicle*, 15 September 1938, p. 11, quoted in Gannon, p. 209.

to contain Hitler.<sup>431</sup> However, despite all these efforts, the Sudetenland was given to Germany, and the popular front had failed.

The progress of the popular front was undermined from the beginning by the refusal of the leadership of the Labour Party to allow the affiliation of more radical socialists, especially Communists, into Labour. Although these leaders were pro-Soviet in the international arena, the experience of the 1920s had convinced them that the Communists could not be trusted domestically. They had not enjoyed being called 'social fascists' up until 1935, and were extremely suspicious of the sudden change in the CPGB's line.<sup>432</sup> Francis Williams of the *Daily Herald* allowed that 'superficially the idea [of a united working class] has a certain attraction'. However, the goal of a democratic, socialist government in Britain would not be achieved through affiliation with the Communists or through Communist methods.<sup>433</sup> In a pragmatic sense, too, affiliation with the Communists could drive away even more voters than it would bring in.<sup>434</sup> As a result, leaders like Attlee or Citrine were extremely critical of the attempts of Sir Stafford Cripps of the Socialist League to persuade the party to risk everything by allowing the Communists into its ranks.<sup>435</sup> Eventually, they shut down attempts at building workers' fronts by banning party members from joining groups like the Socialist League.<sup>436</sup> This was a very effective damper on the progress of the popular front.

The ability of the popular front to maintain left-wing unity was undermined further by outbursts of anti-Sovietism on some parts of the Left.<sup>437</sup> While most of the Left celebrated Soviet intervention in Spain as an entirely good thing, the Soviet Union's growing control over the Republican forces there broke the pro-Soviet paradigm for some left-wingers, such as members of the ILP. These people believed that the USSR had used its services to the Spanish Republic to quash rival left-wing groups like the POUM, becoming a counter-revolutionary force. George Orwell was one of the newly disillusioned writers. In his article, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', he commented on the

---

<sup>431</sup> Neavill, p. 211.

<sup>432</sup> *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1936, p. 10; and 16 July 1936, p. 10; and Williams, p. 214.

<sup>433</sup> *Daily Herald*, 2 July 1936, p. 10; and Corthorn and Davis, pp. 79-80.

<sup>434</sup> Labour Party, *Unity – True or Sham?* (1939), p. 5, quoted in Corthorn and Davis, p. 82.

<sup>435</sup> *Daily Herald*, 30 January 1937, p. 8.

<sup>436</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 148-150, 155, 158.

<sup>437</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, p. 242-243.

irony that the 'class war', which anti-Soviets feared was happening in Spain, was actually being suppressed by the Communists in the interests of Soviet foreign policy requirements:

The Spanish war has probably produced a richer crop of lies than any event since the Great War of 1914-1918, but I honestly doubt, in spite of all those hetacombs of nuns who have been raped and crucified before the eyes of *Daily Mail* reporters, whether it is the pro-Fascist newspapers that have done the most harm. It is the left-wing papers, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Worker*, with their far subtler methods of distortion, that have prevented the British public from grasping the real nature of the struggle. ... The point to notice now is that the people who are in prison now are not Fascists but revolutionaries; they are not there because their opinions are too much to the Right, but because they are too much to the Left.<sup>438</sup>

Former pro-Soviets, like Fenner Brockway of the ILP, agreed that the USSR had become so committed to alliances with the capitalist West that it was undermining socialism in Spain, and retarding the war effort against Franco.<sup>439</sup> This was a betrayal of socialism, and so the Soviet leaders could no longer be supported.

However, these left-wing dissidents did not fit into the larger picture that was being painted by both sides. As Orwell himself said, the dissidents were correct, while Soviet foreign policy and popular front policy were incorrect. However, he lamented, 'the menacing rise of Hitler has made it very difficult to view the situation objectively.'<sup>440</sup> All of the Left, including the dissidents, agreed that fascism must be resisted. However, the dissidents could not bring themselves to agree with the majority of the Left on the methods of resistance. It seemed clear to the pro-Soviet majority that anyone who took a stand against fascism must be supported, even capitalist leaders. The dissidents' belief that the working class on its own must conquer Hitler seemed utterly removed from

---

<sup>438</sup> 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', *New English Weekly*, 29 July and 2 September 1937, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 269-270.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*; and *Workers Fight*, November 1938, p. 4; and F. Brockway, *Workers' Front* (London, 1938), pp. 102, 117, 133, 139. See also Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 163, 179.

<sup>440</sup> 'Review: Workers' Front', *New English Weekly*, 17 February 1938, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 304-305.

reality, while the dissidents' anger towards the Soviet Union was incompatible with the prevailing mood of support for Stalin's foreign policy. And so people like Orwell or the members of the ILP found themselves battling almost hopelessly against the pro-Soviet interpretation of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>441</sup>

### **The events of 1939-1941**

Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 brought an increasing fervour to the pro-Soviet Left's calls for collective security against aggression. The Left was joined by growing numbers of right-wingers who had come to recognise that Hitler posed a much more immediate danger to Britain than Stalin did, and increasing numbers on both sides called for an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Red Army was strong, and its military effectiveness was much greater than that of the old tsarist army. As the Conservative MP Robert Boothby argued, 'the indisputable fact remains that Russia is one of the greatest world Powers and that her resources both in men and in materials are virtually unlimited.' Statements like these were echoed by most pro-Soviets.<sup>442</sup> This strategic emphasis in the popular front's case for an alliance would seem to support Paul Corthorn's analysis. 'More forcefully than ever, the Labour left was publicly asserting the ideological imperative of defending Britain and merely using an alliance with the Soviet Union as a means to this end.' Therefore, most of the Left no longer bothered with an ideological or positive presentation of the internal system of the Soviet Union. Corthorn, as we have seen, argues that this was a result of the disillusioning effects of the Soviet terror of the late 1930s.<sup>443</sup>

However, the Left had not discarded its ideological commitment to the Soviet Union. Those on the Left who supported collective security with the USSR did speak of an alliance in pragmatic terms more often, but this does not mean they no longer identified ideologically with the Soviet Union. Instead, the Left had learned to frame its arguments in a way that would be more acceptable to non-socialist listeners. This reflected the

---

<sup>441</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, p. 165.

<sup>442</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 April 1939, p. 16; and Gedye, pp. 387-388.

<sup>443</sup> Corthorn, *In the Shadow*, pp. 198, 206.

mood of the times, dominated by the pressing issue of Hitler's aggression. It echoed Stalin himself, whose language of foreign policy at the time was clear and direct, a question of strategy more than Marxist doctrine, as the Conservative *National Review* approvingly noted.<sup>444</sup> It also echoed the British Communists, who had toned down the Marxist jargon for reasons of expediency.<sup>445</sup> Supporters continued to uphold a positive image of the Soviet Union with its love of peace, supported by a rosy view of its domestic affairs. The country was a 'powerful bastion of international law', an advocate of the 'ordinary decent man and woman', and it was bringing into being 'that society in which every man will be completely free'.<sup>446</sup> These were hardly negative perspectives on the Soviet regime.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of late August 1939 changed everything. It astounded those in Britain who had fought for collaboration with the USSR. As H. N. Brailsford put it, 'On Tuesday morning we awakened to discover that the world had tumbled about our ears overnight.'<sup>447</sup> As if this were not bad enough, after Hitler's invasion of Poland from the west, the Soviet Union invaded from the east on 17 September. Poland was partitioned between the two invaders. The Soviet Union, which had seemed so committed a supporter of anti-fascism, had made a deal with the enemy, even collaborating with Germany in aggression.<sup>448</sup> 'There is much sheer bewilderment,' reported the *New Statesman and Nation*.<sup>449</sup> For several days after the news of the Berlin-Moscow agreement, most left-wing newspapers were unsure what to believe.<sup>450</sup> Some editors, though pessimistic, wondered if the agreement contained an 'escape clause' in the case of German aggression against another country.<sup>451</sup> Many other pro-Soviets hoped that the pact was not what Berlin interpreted it to be. The Labour MP Edith Summerskill even refused to believe in the pact until she saw it signed.<sup>452</sup>

---

<sup>444</sup> *National Review*, April 1939, p. 423.

<sup>445</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the *Daily Worker*, 1 May 1939, p. 4 and 8 May 1939, p. 1. See also Morgan, *Against Fascism*, pp. 75-77, 82 and fn. 66 for the complicated aspects of the CPGB's attitude to right-wing anti-fascism.

<sup>446</sup> *Reynolds News*, 2 April 1939, p. 10; *Manchester Guardian*, 20 March 1939, p. 10; and *Left News*, February 1939, p. 1153.

<sup>447</sup> *Reynolds News*, 27 August 1939, p. 4.

<sup>448</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1939, p. 3.

<sup>449</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 September 1939, p. 423.

<sup>450</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>451</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 August 1939, p. 8; and *Manchester Guardian*, 24 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>452</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1939, pp. 8, 12.

A portion of the moderate Left soon condemned what the pact seemed to be, even if they were unsure of its significance. Francis Williams labelled the pact a 'betrayal', even while he hoped it was not as bad as it seemed. While the finger of blame could be pointed at British leaders with some justification, this did not excuse Stalin's perfidy.<sup>453</sup> Writers in the *Manchester Guardian* agreed that the Soviet Union's action could not be redeemed.<sup>454</sup> Typically, it was Brailsford who most memorably expressed the conclusions drawn by influential intellectual observers. 'Europe has become a finishing school for cynics. Munich was the kindergarten; Moscow is the graduate's class.' For Brailsford, it was no use expending more words on 'the bitterness that is in our hearts'. It was time for the Left to move on and address the situation left to them by Chamberlain and Stalin, as depressingly hopeless as it was. This was disenchantment indeed.<sup>455</sup>

Communists and their non-party supporters did not respond with public censure, although in private the change came as a shock, producing a few resignations.<sup>456</sup> The Central Committee of the CPGB immediately designated the Nazi-Soviet pact 'a victory for peace and Socialism'. According to the official line of the CPGB, a strong Soviet Union had forced Hitler to give up his designs on conquering the Soviet Union, breaking the Anti-Comintern bonds asunder.<sup>457</sup> Although this went too far for most observers, a number of people were persuaded by CPGB statements to withhold judgment. The Soviet invasion of Poland was justified as a move in defence of the Jewish and White Russian minorities in Eastern Poland. D. N. Pritt urged calmness of mind in a book rushed to print. 'The U.S.S.R. had ample justification in morals and in international law for what she did.'<sup>458</sup> With other intellectuals like J. B. S. Haldane,<sup>459</sup> Pritt urged patience.

---

<sup>453</sup> *Daily Herald*, 22 August 1939, p. 8; and 28 August 1939, p. 8; and *Reynolds News*, 24 September 1939, p. 6.

<sup>454</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>455</sup> *Reynolds News*, 27 August 1939, p. 4; and 24 September 1939, p. 6.

<sup>456</sup> Almond, p. xiii; and Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, p. 256.

<sup>457</sup> *Daily Worker*, 23 August 1939, pp. 1, 3; and 25 August 1939, p. 3.

<sup>458</sup> D. N. Pritt, *Light on Moscow: Soviet Policy Analysed* (Harmondsworth, 1939), p. 143.

<sup>459</sup> J. B. S. Haldane, *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 September 1939, p. 455.



Stalin was still working for peace, although through different methods. As historian David Childs writes, this point of view was still not unusual.<sup>460</sup>

Likewise, a significant number of non-Communists continued to blame capitalist leaders for everything that had gone wrong. Many echoed the *Daily Worker*, insisting that the British leaders had not worked sincerely enough towards an alliance. 'Mr Chamberlain's treatment of Russia is something for which the British nation must and will call him to account,' wrote the editor of *Reynolds News*.<sup>461</sup> A door-to-door survey conducted by Mass Observation soon after the news of the pact shows that this feeling was not at all unusual. Though many criticised Stalin's action in itself, the majority of respondents blamed the British leaders for dragging their feet in the negotiations with the USSR. 'By people talking and what I've seen in the paper it seems that Chamberlain could have averted it a lot,' said one woman.<sup>462</sup> If these points were allowed, it was much easier for anti-fascists to assimilate these events into their pro-Soviet understanding of the Soviet Union.

In fact, many British observers continued to hope that the USSR was still on their side. This was partly because it was so difficult to believe that sworn enemies like the Nazis and the Bolsheviks could be friends. Mass-Observation reports in September and October show that it was not uncommon to express the belief that the Soviet Union must have her 'tongue in her cheek', or that Stalin still had 'something up his sleeve'.<sup>463</sup> This belief even appeared in the mostly critical *Daily Herald*, as shown in the cartoon below, depicting the Russian bear as an unpredictable force which the Nazis were unlikely to be able to control.<sup>464</sup>

---

<sup>460</sup> D. Childs, 'The British Communist Party and the War, 1939-41: Old Slogans Revived', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April 1977), p. 239.

<sup>461</sup> *Reynolds News*, 27 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>462</sup> MOA: TC Town and District Survey 1938-49, 7/F, Fulham: Responses to QQ on the news of Russia making a pact with Germany, the effect on England and whether anything could have been done to stop it. 22.8.39.

<sup>463</sup> MOA: TC Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia, A. F. Coles, Higham Park, 20 September 1939 and Russia from Overheard Remarks, October 1939.

<sup>464</sup> *Daily Herald*, 19 September 1939, p. 4.



It was also possible to take a hopeful point of view of the future of Anglo-Soviet relations. A number of observers chose to interpret the Soviet invasion of Poland as evidence of a continued commitment to anti-fascism. A. L. Rowse of the Labour Party was particularly optimistic, writing to the *New Statesman and Nation*, 'This country may have reason to be grateful that the Russians are covering the Rumanian frontier. More power to their elbow!'<sup>465</sup>

Such confidence in Soviet intentions was possible because the Communist Party still backed the British war effort. Both the Central Committee and Harry Pollitt released statements, declaring that, even though the government had erred in its dealings with the USSR and must be replaced, the Communist Party still supported democracy in the war against fascism. 'Now that the war is upon us, we Communists cannot stand aside.'<sup>466</sup> This line made sense to the CPGB's anti-fascist allies. While it was in existence, it was easier to give Stalin the benefit of the doubt. The crucial turning point came, however, when the Communist line changed in late September 1939. In response to directions from the Comintern, the Central Committee of the CPGB voted to present the war as an 'imperialist' war, in which the workers should take no part. The Communists called for an immediate overthrow of the current government, and the immediate

<sup>465</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 September 1939, p. 456.

<sup>466</sup> *Daily Worker*, 2 September 1939, pp. 1, 3; and H. Pollitt, *How to Win the War* (1939), p. 4.

cessation of hostilities. The Soviet-German peace proposal should be accepted by the British and French leaders, and it should be left to the German workers to throw off the admittedly 'unbearable yoke of Nazi oppression'.<sup>467</sup> Those Communists who had said otherwise apologised to the readers of the *Daily Worker*, admitting their 'mistakes' and misinterpretation of the war.<sup>468</sup>

The change in line drew the heaviest condemnation yet. For the past five years, the Communist Party had constantly emphasised that fascism must be resisted. They had showered condemnation on the British leaders for attempting to appease Hitler, and now they condemned the British leaders for attempting to resist Hitler. They must have been wrong then, or they were wrong now.<sup>469</sup> The so-called imperialist nature of the war did not lessen the danger of fascism to all the freedoms the British workers had accumulated. Fascism, therefore, must be fought. 'This is not jingoism: it is the law of self-preservation,' wrote one correspondent to *Reynolds News*.<sup>470</sup> The critics had to conclude that the line had only changed in order to find an ideological justification for Stalin's non-Marxist Realpolitik.<sup>471</sup> This disgusted them. 'The Communist parties in every country have shown the world the pitiful little puppets they are,' wrote one critic to the *Left News*.<sup>472</sup> They had become pawns in Hitler's game, and this was the final straw for many.

While the change of Communist line was especially shocking to the Left, the Soviet invasion of Finland on November 30 angered almost all sections of British opinion. Many on the Left and the Right instantly condemned the invasion.<sup>473</sup> Overall, nothing about the situation warranted an invasion or the bombing of civilian centres, and the Soviet Union's claim of 'provocation' from Finland was absurd.<sup>474</sup> For much of the pro-Soviet

---

<sup>467</sup> *Left News*, December 1939, p. 1411; and *Daily Worker*, 30 September 1939, p. 1.

<sup>468</sup> Childs, pp. 239-240, 245; Pritt, *Light on Moscow*, p. 170; and *Daily Worker*, 5 October 1939, p. 3.

<sup>469</sup> *Left News*, February 1940, p. 1444; and July 1940, pp. 1509-1510; and Gollancz, *Betrayal*, p. 187.

<sup>470</sup> *Reynolds News*, 3 December 1939, p. 4. See also *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 January 1941, p. 76; and *Left News*, February 1940, p. 1443.

<sup>471</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 December 1939, p. 5; *Left News*, July 1940, p. 1510; and Gollancz, *Betrayal*, pp. xvii-xix.

<sup>472</sup> *Left News*, January 1940, p. 1424.

<sup>473</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939, p. 6.

<sup>474</sup> *The Times*, 30 November 1939, p. 9; and 16 December 1939, p. 9; *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1939, p. 6; and *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939, p. 2.

Left, reeling from the events of August and September, this brought condemnation of Soviet actions. It was a frequently expressed opinion that the invasion of Finland was just as bad as any Nazi crime.<sup>475</sup> Stalin 'compels us to rank his dictatorship with that of the other totalitarian regimes,' wrote Kingsley Martin.<sup>476</sup> He had cynically invaded an unthreatening country, hardly bothering to find a pretext. This was not socialism, and the *Daily Herald* made it clear that British Labour would not tolerate it:

We have not fought against the immorality of power politics at home to acquiesce in these policies abroad because they are adopted by a dictatorship which once seemed as though it might provide a Socialist model for the world.

This is significant, because those who came to this conclusion no longer felt that the international working class had a responsibility towards the Soviet Union. The invasion of Finland made the Left question and sometimes even reject its underlying loyalty to the so-called socialist state.<sup>477</sup>

As a result, it was no longer possible for many on the pro-Soviet Left to excuse what Stalin had done or to explain away the new Communist line on the war. Earlier events like the show trials had been so confusing, and competing events so dramatic, that it was possible to postpone a conclusion. Similarly, as historian Bill Jones has pointed out, though the Nazi-Soviet pact and the invasion of Poland seemed damning, many of those who were most troubled did not want to protest if there was a chance these events were explicable in an anti-fascist sense. Now, however, the conclusion that Stalin had betrayed socialism seemed unavoidable, and so it was the change in line and the attack on Finland that brought on the full onslaught of Left criticism.<sup>478</sup>

The leaders of the Left Book Club kept any doubts to themselves in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the invasion of Poland. With the change in line, however, the leadership was split. Then the invasion of Finland made Victor Gollancz

---

<sup>475</sup> *Daily Herald*, 2 December 1939, p. 6.

<sup>476</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 December 1939, p. 811.

<sup>477</sup> Quote from *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1939, p. 6; *ibid.*; and *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1939, p. 6.

<sup>478</sup> Jones, p. 47.

vocal.<sup>479</sup> For the first time, the Club published books presenting both sides of the debate. Hewlett Johnson's *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, the Club choice for December 1939, claimed that any mistakes the USSR had made were more than compensated for by the 'moral' and 'material' results of Soviet Communism. All Stalin's actions from August 1939 could be justified.<sup>480</sup> The Club choice for November, on the other hand, was Leonard Woolf's *Barbarians at the Gate*. Woolf argued that two powerful forces influenced the world: barbarism and civilisation. Western civilisation had failed by incorporating the 'economic barbarism' of capitalism; the Soviet Union was the 'heir' to civilisation by resolving to address this. Disastrously, however, the Soviets focused only on economic forms of liberty, and became 'ideologically' barbaric. While the overall thrust of Soviet Communism was towards civilisation, 'the regime was stabilised as a dictatorship, autocratic and authoritarian,' a barbaric state of affairs. This 'fatally compromised' the ability of the Soviet Union to resist the barbaric forces of fascism in Europe.<sup>481</sup>

These two books ignited a fierce debate in the pages of the *Left News*. For the first time, the Club was openly disunited. Harold Laski, now critical, and John Strachey, who was still pro-Communist, were published side by side in strident disagreement, and Strachey insisted on publishing a negative review of *Barbarians at the Gate* in the *Left News*. The two books produced a deluge of letters of resignation or criticism from Club members, the correspondents insisting that one or the other book was not only wrong but also anti-socialist. It was clearly a deeply emotional and bitter experience. As one member put it, if he 'wanted any anti-Soviet filth he would prefer to join the Right Book Club'. On the other hand, another member felt that 'the latest example, in Finland, of Russia's firm will to peace and desire to help small nations to maintain their independence, makes the prospect of [Johnson's] book slightly sickening.'<sup>482</sup> It was a very disuniting time for the Left.

Disillusionment was hastened by the events of 1940 and the Communist reaction to them. The international situation had grown extremely grim. 'The period of lull is over,'

---

<sup>479</sup> *Left News*, May 1940, inset; and November 1940, pp. 1544-1545.

<sup>480</sup> Johnson, pp. 223, 361, 369, 384.

<sup>481</sup> L. Woolf, *Barbarians at the Gate* (London, 1939), pp. 73, 173, 181, 196-197, 219.

<sup>482</sup> *Left News*, January 1940, p. 1421.

wrote Victor Gollancz, 'the Western world ... is fighting to *preserve its very life*.'<sup>483</sup> Holland, Belgium, and Norway surrendered to the Nazis, followed soon after by France. Instead of condemning the Nazis, the Communists targeted the British Government. According to the CPGB, the British and French capitalists had 'drawn' these small countries into the war by violating their neutrality and rejecting the Soviet peace programme, and must bear the blame for the Nazi invasion.<sup>484</sup> It was at this point that some supporters found it too much to bear, breaking from the CPGB. One of the most important was John Strachey, whose commitment to the party had been very strong. He was disgusted that the Communists would 'slur over' Nazi crimes in attempts to condemn the British. He argued now that the defeatist attitude of the Communists in France had made it easier for Pétain to come to terms with the Nazis.<sup>485</sup> For others like Gollancz, who were already vocal in their criticism of Soviet foreign policy, the extremity of war made their stance much more determined. Gollancz in particular became much less tolerant of Communist propaganda in the *Left News*, and he called more actively for a rejection of the Communist line.<sup>486</sup>

For many Communists, the decision to remain loyal to the Soviet Union regardless of these events was not difficult. One correspondent to the *New Statesman and Nation* spelled this out frankly. 'Whatever ... advances the power of the Soviet Union advances socialism,' and so the USSR had to be supported.<sup>487</sup> A significant number of Communists had never felt comfortable with Pollitt's initial line of supporting the war, and for them the change in line was a relief. Still, others were shocked and confused by the change in line and the invasion of Finland.<sup>488</sup> After receiving instructions from the Comintern, the Central Committee voted to reject the war against Germany. While only two eventually voted against this decision, they were important members—Harry Pollitt, leader of the Party, and J. R. Campbell, the editor of the *Daily Worker*. Meanwhile, William Gallacher, the only Communist MP, had to be persuaded by Pollitt to vote for the change, in the interests of maintaining a strong Communist stand in Parliament. Pollitt and Campbell

---

<sup>483</sup> *Left News*, May 1940, inset.

<sup>484</sup> Childs, pp. 243-244; Jones, p. 49; and *Daily Worker*, 13 May 1940, p. 3.

<sup>485</sup> *Left News*, July 1940, p. 1498; and August 1940, pp. 1524-1525.

<sup>486</sup> *Left News*, May 1940, inset.

<sup>487</sup> Letter from Archibald Robertson, *New Statesman and Nation*, 20 December 1939, quoted in Jones, p. 39.

<sup>488</sup> Morgan, *Against Fascism*, pp. 91-102.

were removed from their leadership positions, although they remained within the Party, and they both published an apology in the *Daily Worker* for their mistake in misinterpreting the war earlier on. Gallacher's behaviour in Parliament toed the line admirably, but within the Party his anger was clear.<sup>489</sup>

How, then, did these leaders along with those who agreed with them in the rank and file remain within the Party, defending their position in public? Officially, the CPGB coped by denying that the line had changed at all. 'I recognise no change whatsoever ... in the fundamental policy of the Communist Party,' said Party apologist Pat Sloan. It had always wanted peace; it still worked for the same policy. Its tactics had merely changed. The British Conservatives had rejected the Peace Front, and in so doing made the war inevitable. Communists, however, continued to fight fascism *in Britain* by calling for a genuine People's Government. Only after that could come the overthrow of Hitlerism.<sup>490</sup> The Communists also tried to divert attention from the issue by attacking their opponents. Firstly, they attacked Finland, whose history was revised by Communist functionaries such as Emile Burns. It had obviously been preparing for an attack on the USSR, and so Stalin had no choice but to invade.<sup>491</sup> Secondly, party leaders attacked their opponents on the Left, who were mocked or censured vigorously. This was an attack that was echoed by many (though not all) of the rank and file, some of whom wrote aggrieved or even rude letters to journals like the *Left News* after Strachey's change of heart.<sup>492</sup>

Some Communists or their supporters, however, remained perplexed. Official denial was not sufficient as a coping strategy, especially as bombs began to fall in Britain and the war intensified abroad. A number of prominent intellectuals made clumsy attempts to support the Communists without entirely rejecting the war effort. J. B. S. Haldane, for example, vocally defended the Communist line on the war, but also worked in his scientific capacity for the British armed forces, a somewhat contradictory position that

---

<sup>489</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, pp. 258-260; Jupp, p. 121; and Childs, pp. 245-246.

<sup>490</sup> *Left News*, May 1940, pp. 1490-1491; *Daily Worker*, 9 October 1939, p. 3; and *Reynolds News*, 19 November 1939, p. 4.

<sup>491</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 December 1939, p. 5; *Daily Worker*, 1 December 1939, p. 3 and 2 December 1939, p. 6; Pritt, *Must the War Spread?*, pp. 136, 157; and E. Burns, *The Soviet Union and Finland* (1940), pp. 2-4.

<sup>492</sup> *Left News*, August 1940, p. 1525.

must have been awkward for him.<sup>493</sup> Hewlett Johnson even criticised Stalin, writing to the *New Statesman and Nation* that the invasion of Finland was ‘indefensible and bitterly regretted’, and, somewhat absurdly, that the Soviet leaders ‘lack essential Christian qualities’. However, this was a statement that, once made, was not absorbed into his position.<sup>494</sup>

These supporters managed to deal with the evident contradictions of their positions by focusing on the threat to the USSR from reactionary forces. Communists and non-Communists alike feared that right-wingers would try to ‘switch the war’ against the Soviet Union instead of Germany. It was not difficult to respond in this way, given the publicity given to some influential voices calling for the expansion or redirection of the war, if Finland’s struggle lasted. D. N. Pritt, in his 1940 book *Must the War Spread?*, quoted one Conservative MP who publicly suggested that Communist expansion was now the greater threat. ‘I can even visualise our troops fighting side by side with the Germans to defeat the Bolshevist menace.’<sup>495</sup> The British capitalists were warmongering, attempting to destroy the USSR because it was socialist, argued the Communists. The workers must not allow themselves to be manipulated. Echoing the cry from the early period of intervention, Emile Burns wrote, ‘Hands off the Soviet Union!’<sup>496</sup> It was this coping mechanism—almost an instinctive response to the real existence of capitalist war hunger against the socialist state—that enabled Communists and their sympathisers to continue to support the Soviet Union. They had learnt by experience, since the birth of the Soviet state, to detest right-wing hatred of the Soviet Union, and so right-wing hatred sustained their support even at this point.

---

<sup>493</sup> Werskey, pp. 264-265; and Cauter, *Fellow-Travellers*, p. 205.

<sup>494</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 16 December 1939, p. 893.

<sup>495</sup> Cyril Culverwell, quoted in Pritt, *Must the War Spread?*, p. 185.

<sup>496</sup> *Daily Worker*, 2 December 1939, p. 1; and 6 December 1939, p. 3; and Burns, pp. 1, 15-16.





Cartoon in the *Daily Worker*.<sup>497</sup>

As time went on, the Communist Party toned down the line. Those who spoke for it did not officially repent of anything they had said, but the emphasis seemed to change, as events grew grimmer. The cartoon above, published in May 1940, shows 'Victory 194-', marked by a huge pile of skulls and weeping British and German women. There is a qualitative difference between this type of war criticism and the debates over who was to blame for the war or the nature of the war itself. Later in 1940, as an account of one Communist meeting shows, some Communists even admitted mistakes:

The working class of Great Britain is in a slightly more advantageous position than most, because the CP is not yet illegal. ... The CP has made many mistakes. They have opposed the imperialist war, but they mustn't forget that they must oppose with equal vigour an imperialist peace.<sup>498</sup>

<sup>497</sup> *Daily Worker*, 15 May 1940, p. 3.

<sup>498</sup> MOA: TC London Survey 1940, 1/A, 2.8.40, Stepney. Open Branch Meeting of Stepney Communist Party.

As Andrew Thorpe has shown, changes in circumstances, especially the fall of France, made Communists 'still more eager to avoid detailed discussion of their attitude towards the conflict'. He writes that, from that point, the CPGB made no further calls for peace negotiations, and focused mainly on smaller issues within Britain.<sup>499</sup> For the Communists and pro-Soviets who remained committed, this certainly made it easier to ignore the challenge to their pro-Soviet beliefs, aligning their instinctive anti-fascism with their pro-Communism.

However, for a number of people, the events of 1939-1940 brought on their disillusionment with Soviet Communism. Although it took John Strachey longer than his fellow Left Book Club leaders to criticise Soviet actions in this period, his break is the more significant because it affected his stance on socialism as a whole. His writings in the *Left News* through 1940 and into 1941 show that he was coming to terms with his break in a very final way. By May 1941, he wrote:

The S.U. went through such appalling struggles ... in order to survive, that in the process of surviving it turned into something different. 'The bastion was preserved,' but when it had been preserved it was no longer the bastion—the price was too high. The S.U. ceased in actual, psychological fact to be the fatherland of the workers of the West. ... The class conscious worker of the West can feel respect for, and desire for good relations with the S.U., but not the enthusiasm and inspiration of a fatherland.

And the truth is that I can no longer passionately desire a world revolution led by the C.I., and resulting in the establishment of a political system and economy built upon the Soviet model, over all, or much, of the world.<sup>500</sup>

This was a profound disillusionment for Strachey. As his biographer Michael Newman writes, it was a traumatic adjustment, because 'his theoretical and emotional commitment had been so total.'<sup>501</sup> While he retained an interest in the Soviet Union, he was no longer willing to attach his hopes to it in the same way ever again.

---

<sup>499</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, pp. 262, 264, 267.

<sup>500</sup> *Left News*, May 1941, pp. 1720, 1722.

<sup>501</sup> Newman, p. 77.

For others, there were limits to this disillusionment, or ways to cope. Sometimes those who had immediately criticised the Soviet leaders at the point of the Nazi-Soviet Pact did not feel quite so personally betrayed. Harold Laski and Clement Attlee, for example, continued to view the Soviet Union as a potential ally in the longer term.<sup>502</sup> Others emphasised, as usual, that the great achievements of the Russian Revolution still remained, while many echoed the Communist concern about the Right's attempts to 'switch the war' against the USSR.<sup>503</sup> However, unlike previous situations where these coping strategies had been used, there was always a 'but'. Disappointed pro-Soviets like Laski were no longer willing to blame everything on the British leaders, although they bore a partial guilt. As Brailsford pointed out, Stalin himself had 'inflamed' the Right, and could blame no one else.<sup>504</sup> Coping mechanisms therefore only went so far, and did not dominate the traditional pro-Soviet response to challenge in this period. While they did perhaps prevent many pro-Soviets from becoming completely disillusioned, they stopped them only at the verge of it.

While many did not lose all vestiges of their pro-Sovietism, disillusionment with Soviet Communism was plainly visible in the public discourse of the Left. This necessitated a re-appraisal of the Soviet Union and of all the pro-Soviet discourse of previous years, beginning with a defence of the British society labelled an equivalent form of dictatorship by Communists. This did not come naturally to many on the Left, who were well aware of the failings of capitalism.<sup>505</sup> However, most accepted that this was not enough to equate British society with fascist societies.<sup>506</sup> There *were* differences, practical differences that were crucial to the progress of socialism.<sup>507</sup> The inability of Communists to comprehend these differences was extremely concerning to many on the non-Communist Left. Communists had made Moscow as well as Marxism infallible, and disdained any liberty other than economic liberty, as if political democracy was anti-Marxist in itself. These attributes had turned them into manipulative liars, guilty of

---

<sup>502</sup> Corthorn and Davis, pp. 99, 102.

<sup>503</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 December 1939, p. 812; *Reynolds News*, 3 December 1939, p. 8; and Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter*, p. 269.

<sup>504</sup> *Reynolds News*, 3 December 1939, p. 8; and *Left News*, December 1939, p. 1408.

<sup>505</sup> *Left News*, January 1940, p. 1417.

<sup>506</sup> *Left News*, January 1941, p. 1607.

<sup>507</sup> *Left News*, May 1940, inset; and February 1940, p. 1443.

‘intellectual malpractice’ for the sake of the cause, which was ‘the very mark of Fascism’, in Gollancz’s words. Therefore, it had been impossible for Moscow to resist fascism effectively.<sup>508</sup>

Many of these writers revised their pro-Sovietism, and re-evaluated the past decade and their own decisions. They considered the effect of the economic slump on the world, along with the violent struggle to collectivise the Soviet Union. John Strachey reflected on the purges and show trials. He still believed in the guilt of Trotsky and those who had been on trial. However, he believed now that ‘the enforcement of mental uniformity’ on the USSR had been responsible for creating this resistance. The Communist approach to political liberty had therefore injured the socialist cause.<sup>509</sup> For those who had excused the problems, this was a troubling issue, and Gollancz came to believe he had been at great fault:

I am as sure as a man can be ... that all this was wrong: ... wrong in the harm it did to Russia, because that country, in which there is so much greatness and still more hope, can only be injured by a sycophancy that treats her as a spoilt child instead of as an adult with errors and crimes as grievous as our own.<sup>510</sup>

Pro-Soviets in this period, therefore, found themselves undergoing painful paradigm shifts, even to the point of paradigm reversal for some. They were traumatic adjustments to make.

### **The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the wartime alliance**

Fortunately for the war effort and for the continued existence of pro-Sovietism, Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941. This was yet another turning point in British relations with the Soviet Union. It brought a Treaty of Alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union, while the USSR became popular in a way that had never been possible before, as

---

<sup>508</sup> *Left News*, January 1940, p. 1425; February 1940, p. 1445; and March 1940, p. 1459; Gollancz, *Betrayal*, pp. 35-36; and Woolf, pp. 199-200.

<sup>509</sup> *Left News*, January 1941, pp. 1606-1607.

<sup>510</sup> Gollancz, *Betrayal*, p. 298.

British people from many different political backgrounds expressed their enthusiasm for the Soviet war effort. Did the undeniable popularity of the Soviet Union at war necessarily heal all of the Left's wounds? Historians such as David Caute suggest that the invasion brought immediate, unlimited enthusiasm for the Soviet Union and her leaders from Labour and the Left, while F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells suggest that 'criticism of the USSR became tantamount to treason' right from the start.<sup>511</sup>

This is an exaggeration. The Left, disunited and confused after two years of seeing the USSR allied with Germany, did not respond with such instant enthusiasm for their new allies as these historians would suggest. The Labour Party, for example, through the *Daily Herald*, emphasised its suspicion of the Soviet leaders and their ideological differences, despite its acknowledgement that it placed a higher priority on the pragmatic acceptance of the Soviet Union's new role in the fight against Hitler.<sup>512</sup> A spokesperson for the National Trade Union Club also appeared particularly begrudging, with this comment: 'The joining of Russia in this war is purely a military matter for us and nothing else. ... Since Russia is bringing in so many [planes, guns and soldiers] we welcome them in the fight.'<sup>513</sup> Most of those who had come to disillusionment over the last two years were extremely unlikely to display the naivety implied by Caute.

Like most right-wingers, the moderate Left did extend their immediate goodwill to the Soviet Union as a fellow victim of Nazi aggression. Disillusioned left-wingers and pro-Soviets who were still hanging on agreed with almost everybody else that the war effort must be paramount. There should be no recriminations. Writers like Gollancz still tended to dwell on the past two years, but admitted nonetheless that they must make an attempt to stop:

If ordinary socialists cannot at once forget ... what the *Daily Worker* was writing all those terrible months when Britain, then alone, was 'bearing the brunt' ... let such socialists remember that nothing matters, as nothing has mattered since 1933, but the defeat of fascism, and that the energy, enthusiasm and devotion of

---

<sup>511</sup> Caute, *Fellow-Travellers*, p. 208; and Northedge and Wells, p. 151.

<sup>512</sup> *Daily Herald*, 26 June 1941, p. 2.

<sup>513</sup> Walter Schevenels, *Reynolds News*, 29 June 1941, p. 2.

Communists, in which they are unrivalled, must be utilised to the full for this supreme end.<sup>514</sup>

Nevertheless, this cannot be interpreted as an immediate reversion to full support of the USSR. It would take some time before enthusiasm overwhelmed suspicion among those who were regaining their pro-Sovietism.

As the struggle of the Soviet Union against Nazism drew increasing admiration, however, some on the Left began to revise the negative judgments they had formed over the past two years. They looked back on Soviet history since the revolution, condemning the way the Soviet Union had been presented in their country. Some discovered that Soviet history since the beginning of the Five Year Plans was completely explicable and had been consciously driven in the expectation of the coming war. This was certainly the point of view of the Communist Party and its adherents. 'Fascism may have accomplished one historical task,' wrote R. Palme Dutt, the Party theorist: 'It has taught a lesson to the Left.'<sup>515</sup> It was now obvious to people like him that the violence against the kulaks and the show trials and purges were necessary measures against 'potential quislings'.<sup>516</sup> The Five Year Plans and collectivisation, with all their hardship and struggle, had provided all the necessary materials for the defence of the Soviet Union, and were absolutely necessary. The non-Communist Alexander Werth concluded, then, that 'on vital issues, Stalin got things done.'<sup>517</sup>

These 'lessons' were also applied to the two years between the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Operation Barbarossa. The pact itself was justified, again, by arguing that Chamberlain's Britain would have been more likely to watch Germany demolish Soviet resistance without lifting a finger than to create a working alliance with Russia. Stalin's decision

---

<sup>514</sup> *Left News*, July 1941, p. 1782.

<sup>515</sup> Dutt, *25 Years*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>516</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 13 June 1942, p. 392; A. Werth, *Moscow '41* (London, 1942), pp. 50-51; A. Inkpin, *Friends of the U.S.S.R.: The Story of the Russia To-day Society* (London, 1942), p. 9; D. N. Pritt, *The U.S.S.R. Our Ally* (London, 1941), pp. 16, 27-28; and MOA: DR 1362, reply to January 1943 directive.

<sup>517</sup> Bernard Pares in *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1941, p. 4; *Reynolds News*, 6 July 1941, p. 4; Maynard (1942), pp. 291, 303; Werth, p. 49; and MOA: DR 1264, reply to January 1942 directive.

was excusable, if not the best option. It also gave him time to extend the Red Army.<sup>518</sup> The actions Stalin had taken following this were even more justifiable. The invasion of Finland, eastern Poland, the Baltic States, and so on provided a buffer, preparing the USSR for the invasion by Hitler which Stalin knew was inevitable.<sup>519</sup> Britain should be 'extremely thankful' that the Soviet Union had occupied these countries and effectively retarded the German attack in June 1941, said D. N. Pritt.<sup>520</sup>

However, the Left had become more fragmented, and these arguments were not echoed by most pro-Soviets. They agreed now that Britain's leaders had made mistakes, and that the real achievements of the Soviet Union deserved to be praised.<sup>521</sup> However, past critics did not rehabilitate Stalin. Instead, they challenged Britain to move on from these issues, for the sake of the future world. This did not mean that criticism was never helpful, but British people must try to understand the difficulties that the USSR had faced in the past, and recognise that the Soviet Union was now a grown-up state, worthy of future support.<sup>522</sup> 'Nagging at the Soviet Union—a favourite pastime of unemployed Socialists—is the worst possible preparation for the tasks of social building which lie ahead of us,' wrote G. D. H. Cole. Differences with the Communists must also be overcome.<sup>523</sup> This part of the Left therefore encouraged each other to find a way to cope with the actions of Stalin in the past, however wrong they had been.

While the Left strongly supported the Soviet Union's fight against fascism, its members presented a disunited image of the Soviet system during these years. Enthusiasm for the Soviet cause did grow again. However, among some significant observers, this enthusiasm was almost always qualified. Orwell believed that 'the USSR has gained a lot of admirers it did not previously have, but many who used to be its uncritical adherents

---

<sup>518</sup> Cole, *Europe, Russia and the Future*, pp. 18, 25; and Inkpin, p. 10.

<sup>519</sup> Albert Inkpin, *New Statesman and Nation*, 13 June 1942, p. 388.

<sup>520</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 July 1941, p. 60; Inkpin, p. 10; Werth, pp. 8, 48; and Pritt, *The U.S.S.R. Our Ally*, p. 9, 23.

<sup>521</sup> MOA: TC 25 Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56, 4/A, Russia Q.Q., Paddington, L.B., 20.11.42.

<sup>522</sup> *Left News*, September 1942, p. 2221; and MOA: DR 1362, reply to January 1943 directive.

<sup>523</sup> Cole, *Europe, Russia and the Future*, p. 34; Werth, p. 48; and Harold Laski, *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 July 1941, p. 4.

have grown cannier.’<sup>524</sup> While the Left used the USSR’s military success to support its own proposals for Britain’s future, Stalinism was not going to receive uncritical adulation from all. The reaction to the military achievements of the USSR during the war was confused, and confusing, among the Left. Undoubtedly most left-wingers were passionate believers in the heroism of the Soviet struggle against Hitler, but this enthusiasm co-existed with the disappointment which a significant number still felt in regards to the Soviet system and leadership. The efforts towards unity that marked much of the Left before 1939 were not rekindled now.<sup>525</sup>

While the Communist Party of Great Britain was welcomed back into the anti-fascist fold with its change of line in 1941, the respect it had lost from the rest of the Left since 1939 would not be regained.<sup>526</sup> The gyrations it had performed in order to stick to the ‘line’ were ridiculous and uninspiring, agreed many left-wingers, and so a ‘gap remained’ between the CPGB and everyone else on the Left, as Bill Jones writes.<sup>527</sup> Even writers like G. D. H. Cole, who called for the introduction of the Soviet model into other European countries, were unlikely to give the Communists any credit. ‘They support the war,’ he wrote, ‘not because the Nazis are threatening all Western civilisation and every democratic and national liberty, but, from what they say, solely because the Soviet Union is in danger.’<sup>528</sup> In consequence, the non-Communist Left was much harder on the Communists than it had been before 1939.<sup>529</sup> Despite popular enthusiasm for the Soviet Union, when the CPGB tried to gain Labour Party affiliation in 1943 it failed yet again, by a margin of over 1.2 million votes.<sup>530</sup>

Members of the non-Communist Left did not confine their criticism to the CPGB alone, but continued to condemn the Soviet Union where they saw fit. Those who had become critical between 1939 and 1941 did not simply forgive Stalin of all his crimes. These commentators were often still pro-Soviet, and they reiterated their support for the

---

<sup>524</sup> ‘The British Crisis: London Letter to Partisan Review’, *Partisan Review*, July-August 1942, in Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 213.

<sup>525</sup> Jones, pp. 69-70.

<sup>526</sup> Morgan, *Bolshevism*, vol. 1 p. 274.

<sup>527</sup> Jones, p. 66.

<sup>528</sup> Cole, *Europe, Russia and the Future*, p. 26.

<sup>529</sup> *Left News*, August 1941, p. 1826.

<sup>530</sup> Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, p. 270.



Soviet war effort, people, and future. The potential of the Soviet Union, for them, was still great. 'I see, however, no reason why our anxiety for the success of new allies should lead us to falsify history or alter opinions honestly formed,' said one correspondent to the *New Statesman*.<sup>531</sup> The Soviet Union was morally culpable for its most misjudged and immoral deeds, such as its invasion of Finland in 1939.<sup>532</sup> Likewise, the Communist line, which had been so contemptible to the British Left from 1939 to 1941, was imposed on the Comintern by Moscow.<sup>533</sup> So past mistakes were not forgotten.

It seemed to people on the Left, at this point, that they had a real chance to build a socialist Britain in the future. Experience had taught them that if they were to have any chance of success, the past mistakes of the Soviet leaders could not be ignored. It had become increasingly important to identify these flaws in order to avoid them. If Britain were ever to choose socialism democratically, the country needed to see that socialism did not have to be Stalinism.<sup>534</sup> Those who wanted socialism therefore emphasised their dislike for Stalinism. The USSR was a country 'under the dictatorship of a murderer', despite its wonderful economic system, said one Mass-Observation correspondent.<sup>535</sup> While others did not necessarily phrase it quite so brutally, writers like Gollancz agreed that the totalitarian political control of the USSR was not socialism in its ideal incarnation. Dictatorship endangered in its entirety the socialist foundation of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, 'whitewashing' these facts was detrimental to the establishment of socialism in Britain, and created the wrong impression.<sup>536</sup>

Some non-Communist socialists did not agree with this entirely. G. D. H. Cole, for instance, went so far as to suggest that an 'all-European extension' of the Soviet Union might be necessary after the war in order to break the hold of fascism on Europe. He even thought that the suppression of political liberties might be unavoidable in the short term. However, this was not a pleasant thought for him. Despite his pragmatic

---

<sup>531</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 July 1941, p. 36. See also Gollancz, *Russia and Ourselves*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, and *Reynolds News*, 29 June 1941, p. 4.

<sup>533</sup> Cole, *Europe, Russia and the Future*, pp. 23, 25.

<sup>534</sup> *Left News*, November 1941, p. 1903.

<sup>535</sup> MOA: DR 1056, reply to January 1942 directive.

<sup>536</sup> Gollancz, *Russia and Ourselves*, 1941, pp. 46-48, 55-56; V. Gollancz, *Our Threatened Values* (London, 1946), p. 80; and Harold Laski in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 July 1941, p. 4.

acceptance of the probable need for Stalinism, he could not hide his dislike of it, admitting that he would be 'acutely unhappy' in such a society. His argument also depended more on what he thought was practical, in reaction to fascism, than on a devotion to the Soviet system as a positive force.<sup>537</sup> This was a disunited, confusing call from those on the Left who wanted socialism for Britain.

These intellectuals and political leaders were not the only pro-Soviets. The Soviet Union had gained much support among the wider British public since Hitler's invasion of the USSR. The CPGB did not just return to its highest membership levels from before the war, but nearly tripled them. Feeling towards the USSR was friendly among many people who *had* moved on, forgetting the years of the Soviet Union's unpopularity. However, these were in many cases fair weather friends, not committed devotees to Communism. As Kevin Morgan writes, 'for the Communists it was a false dawn.' When the political climate changed with the beginnings of the Cold War, these people changed their allegiances too, as can be seen in the CPGB's decreasing membership and in the declining circulation of the *Daily Worker*.<sup>538</sup> 'Heroic Russia', it turned out, was a popular line to take while the Red Army fought well, and some on the Left exploited it for domestic gain. It was not a permanent line, nor a consistent one. This cynicism was a product of the years between 1939 and 1941.

### **The coping mechanisms**

During the years spanning 1929 to 1943, pro-Soviets had to cope with a number of challenges to their mostly positive conception of the Soviet Union. Their response was remarkably similarly to that of anti-Soviets, in that they used the same kinds of coping mechanisms in a similar order, determined by the intensity of the challenge. In the following section I will consider these similarities, along with some differences.

---

<sup>537</sup> Cole, *Europe, Russia and the Future*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>538</sup> Morgan, *Bolshevism*, vol. 1, pp. 274-275; Thorpe, *British Communist Party*, p. 273; Corthorn and Davis, p. 109; and K. Morgan, 'The Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* 1930-56' in *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*, ed. Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (London and Boulder, 1995), p. 152.

### *1. Ignore the challenge or deny that it is a challenge*

The coping mechanism of denial was associated more often with the extreme pro-Soviets, such as Communists. As more radical socialists, they made more radical claims, calling for the installation in Britain of the Soviet model in its entirety, in the belief that it was the only way forward for socialism and for Britain. If pillars of this belief were endangered by arguments of the anti-Soviets or other pro-Soviets, denial was the only option. If not denied, the whole platform would crumble.

At times of greatest stress, denial was the only possible coping mechanism for Communists, and they retreated into it, instead of admitting more. This is where denial was slightly different for these particular pro-Soviets, as compared to anti-Soviets, who generally admitted more as the threat intensified. This can be seen at all the points at which the Communist Party faced challenges to the USSR which gravely endangered a pillar of their paradigm. In 1933, reports of a man-made famine sweeping across the Soviet Union threatened all their claims that Soviet agricultural policy was wise and well controlled. So they retreated into denial, attempting to ignore the issue entirely for two months, and then denying the reports outright. Criticisms of the show trials, later in the decade, were completely rejected. To make the slightest admission would lead logically to the conclusion that Stalin had betrayed Leninism or that something was gravely wrong in the workers' paradise. And so the trials had to be completely sound and the victims of the trials had to be the blackest villains. Soon after this, the Nazis and the Soviets made their pact, the Communists changed their line and the Soviets invaded Finland. To cope with the enormity of this, Communists retreated yet again into the complete denial of all criticism, until the spotlight was off them slightly.

In times of less stress, however, Communists could use tactics of denial with a little more creativity. For example, when right-wingers attacked the Soviet Union's use of forced labour, Communists allowed that some Soviet prisoners worked while they were incarcerated in an ordinary criminal prison, but they were not used as 'slave labour' in the sense that the critics imagined. They argued that Soviet prison work programmes were meaningful and restorative, compared to Western prison labour. In so doing, Communists denied that the accusation itself was significant, by arguing that forced

labour was not a bad thing, when used by the socialist state. “‘Forced labour”, as part of the Soviet penal system, is a highly humane and educative method of dealing with backward elements,’ reported the *Daily Worker* in 1931.<sup>539</sup> This argument did not allow that the attacks on the Soviet Union were worthy of any attention. It also masked the fact that they were ignoring the more serious accusations of slave labour in the Soviet concentration camps. This allowed Communists to ignore right-wing attacks, and remain on their pro-Soviet platform reasonably comfortably.

Non-Communists also responded to some right-wing criticisms of the USSR by ignoring or by denying them, although this mechanism was more common among Communists. This was a normal response in the period of the first Five Year Plan, when many arguments against the Soviet Union seemed ridiculous or manifestly false. In response to protests against religious persecution, for instance, many on the moderate Left insisted that, while it might be difficult to be a missionary in the Soviet Union, the Soviet Government did not forbid religion within a family setting, nor did it close all or most churches. The *Manchester Guardian* even reported that the Soviet Government actively protected the freedom of religion. It punished people who ‘[jeered] at worship’ and condemned those who closed churches ‘against the desire of the population’.<sup>540</sup> Non-Communists on the Left also responded with scepticism to some of the Right’s extreme portrayal of living conditions inside the Soviet Union. Many reported after travelling to the Soviet Union that they saw absolutely no evidence of the level of privation and hopelessness described by right-wing newspapers.<sup>541</sup> Likewise, the non-Communist Left was immediately scornful of atrocity stories from the Right—whether during the religious persecution scandal or during the Spanish Civil War.

## 2. Attempt to divert attention from the challenge

Like anti-Soviets, pro-Soviets used this coping mechanism very often. More moderate pro-Soviets were less likely than Communists to deny or ignore criticism of the Soviet

---

<sup>539</sup> *Daily Worker*, 3 February 1931, p. 3.

<sup>540</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1930, p. 8 and 17 March 1930, p. 9; and H. N. Brailsford, ‘Russia and Religion’, *New Leader*, 21 February 1930, quoted in Williams, p. 108.

<sup>541</sup> See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1933, p. 18; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 4 March 1933, p. 262.

Union, but this does not mean they were any less determined to cope with criticism. Instead, their natural reflex, when the Soviet Union was under attack, was to point elsewhere. This was an effective way of coping personally with challenge and of distracting others from the issue at hand. The show trials, if dealt with completely on their own, ignoring the context, could have produced much more criticism or a more complete paradigm shift. The Left's diversion of attention to the wider European situation—Hitler on the rise and war looming—prevented this from happening.

The concept of a 'capitalist war' against the Soviet Union was also very useful as a diversionary tactic from the beginning of this period, for many people on the Left. It was assumed by newspapers as diverse as the *Daily Worker* and the *Manchester Guardian* that many of the Right's campaigns against the Soviet Union were really attempts to stir up war hunger in Britain against the socialist state. In a fictional 'Workshop Talk' featured in the *Daily Worker*, 'Tom' tells 'Mike':

That's what all this praying and wailing and gnashing of teeth is for. It's to stoke up religious fanaticism, and give the capitalist governments an excuse for intervention in the Soviet Union.<sup>542</sup>

This coping mechanism was especially helpful for Communists and disappointed pro-Soviets in the aftermath of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. When right-wingers began to suggest that Britain should intervene in Finland against the USSR, it seemed clear that the capitalists were looking for any excuse to attack the Soviet Union, simply because it was socialist.<sup>543</sup>

Pro-Soviets were much more likely than anti-Soviets to divert attention by attacking those who disagreed. Individuals or groups on the Left who dissented or criticised too drastically, or people on the anti-Soviet Right, were subjected to some blistering criticism in response to the issues they raised. Individuals who publicly criticised the Soviet Union on the most challenging issues were targeted for the heaviest

---

<sup>542</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 24 September 1930, p. 1; and *Daily Worker*, 20 February 1930, p. 4.

<sup>543</sup> *Daily Worker*, 2 December 1939, p. 1 and 6 December 1939, p. 3; and Burns, pp. 1, 15-16.

condemnation. H. N. Brailsford stands out as one such individual. As shown earlier in this chapter, he was denounced for his criticism of the Soviet government during the show trials. 'This high-minded idealism, when not accompanied by political consciousness of real class forces, can become grist to the mill of the Edens and the Hitlers,' wrote R. Palme Dutt in a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation*.<sup>544</sup> Palme Dutt, with other Communist Party apologists, attempted to pull anti-socialist episodes from Brailsford's past in an effort to undermine his reputation as a devoted socialist.<sup>545</sup> This tactic was also used after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, when an even fiercer assault was made on Victor Gollancz and others like him for openly reproaching the Soviet leaders.<sup>546</sup>

It was not only Communists who attacked heretics. A wider section of the pro-Soviet Left took part in the condemnation of people like Sir Walter Citrine or André Gide when they critiqued the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s. Citrine's comments in his *Daily Herald* articles were labelled 'carping criticisms', 'deliberately provocative', 'sneering and sniffy', 'coloured by a strong anti-Soviet bias', 'despicable', and many more things by furious letter-writers. For these people, their denigration of Citrine as an individual allowed them personally to avoid considering his opinions. It also allowed them to divert other people's attention from the object of his criticism to the supposedly biased way in which he made it.<sup>547</sup> A more subtle attack was made on André Gide. The Left Book Club publicised Lion Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937* as a more objective point of view, which would correct Gide's exaggerations and misunderstandings.<sup>548</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* also made the slightly patronising comment that Gide was 'oppressed by ugliness'. As a 'sensitive' soul, he was unable to make 'due allowance for present deficiencies'. He 'went to Russia expecting too much', and this was naïve, even 'silly'.<sup>549</sup> These kinds of comments undermined and infantilised Gide, and in so doing made his book seem less hard-hitting.

---

<sup>544</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 July 1937, quoted in Leventhal, 'H. N. Brailsford and Russia', pp. 94-95.

<sup>545</sup> *Daily Worker*, 9 March 1938, p. 2. See also 10 March 1938, p. 2 and 14 March 1938, p. 4; and *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 July 1937, quoted in Leventhal, 'Brailsford and Russia', p. 95.

<sup>546</sup> See, for example, *Daily Worker*, 6 December 1939, p. 3; *Left News*, August 1940, p. 1525; and Burns, pp. 9-10.

<sup>547</sup> *Daily Herald*, 8 July 1936, p. 15, and 9 July 1936, p. 17. See also 6 July 1936, p. 10, and 10 July 1936, p. 16, and 11 July 1936, p. 10, and 13 July 1936, p. 10, and 14 July 1936, p. 14, et cetera.

<sup>548</sup> *Left News*, July 1937, p. 423; and Cauter, *Fellow-Travellers*, p. 101.

<sup>549</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937, p. 739.

As well as attacking individuals, pro-Soviets also diverted attention towards other states and their governments. The Nazis were convenient and natural targets for most of the 1930s. Pro-Soviets who defended the show trials pointed away from them, towards Germany. The execution of proven traitors after a fair trial was simply not comparable to 'Hitler's mass murder of his erstwhile friends', wrote one correspondent to *Reynolds News*.<sup>550</sup> Likewise, the Communists attacked Finland mercilessly after the Soviet Union invaded it in 1939. The country had a superficial appearance of democracy, they argued, but in fact it was only a 'puppet' in the hands of warmongering capitalists. Controlled by 'Butcher' Mannerheim, who had massacred the workers' soviets in 1918, its existence was focused on planning an attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>551</sup> As these attacks were less personal than the attacks on individuals within Britain, they usually produced less hostility in response and were more successful as a strategy.

Britain herself was also a useful focus for diversionary assaults. Communists could point to everything they disliked about Britain and her Empire, in the knowledge that Britain's flaws would seem much closer and more serious to many living in Britain than the flaws of the Soviet Union would seem. Ironically, Communists claimed that the protests in 1931 about forced labour in the USSR were themselves a diversionary tactic, used to conceal the 'slave conditions in the British Empire'.<sup>552</sup> Some people on the moderate Left also used this tactic during the Metro-Vickers affair, when their disgust at the British Government's impetuous actions overwhelmed their displeasure at Soviet injustices. As Kingsley Martin wrote, 'for these infatuated anti-Bolsheviks it seems that peace, trade, and even the safety of the arrested engineers, are bagatelles as compared with the chance of venting their spite.'<sup>553</sup> Pro-Soviets also pointed to British treatment of the Meerut prisoners, who were held in similar conditions in India, as an example of the hypocrisy of the British Government.<sup>554</sup> Because the Left was embarrassed by the actions of their government, it was easier to avoid thinking about the mistakes of the Soviet leaders.

---

<sup>550</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 September 1936, p. 8.

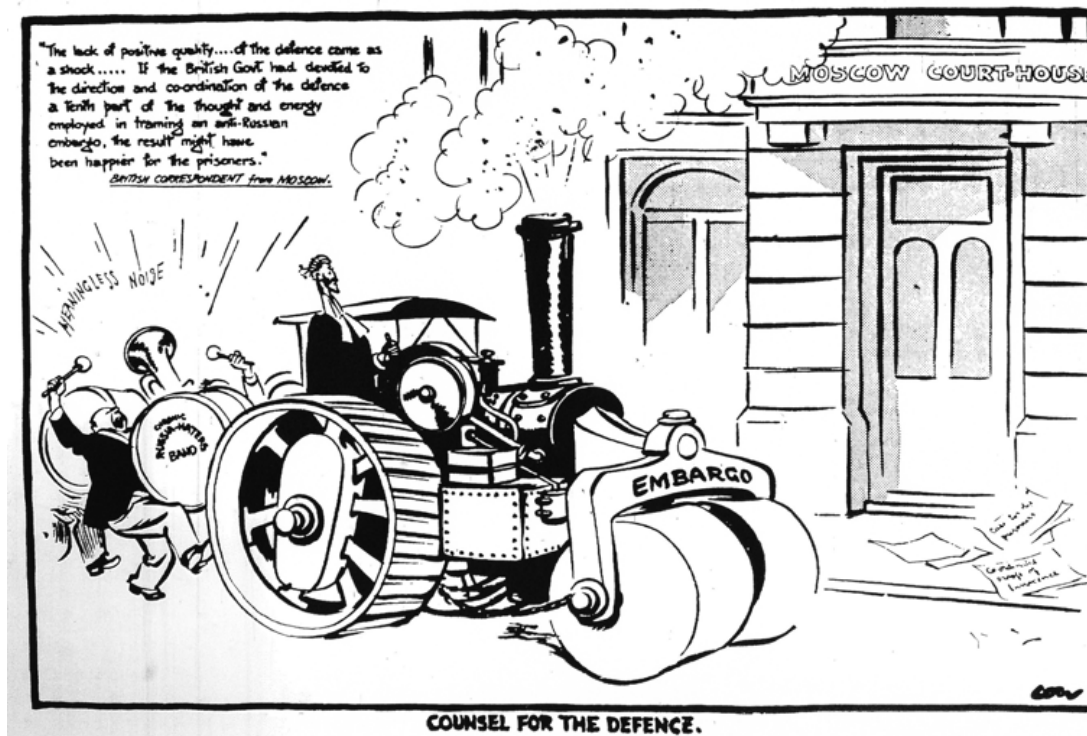
<sup>551</sup> Pritt, *Must the War Spread?*, pp. 136, 157; and Burns, p. 2.

<sup>552</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4 February 1931, p. 1.

<sup>553</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 8 April 1933, p. 433.

<sup>554</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 April 1933, p. 495.

## LOW ON THE MOSCOW TRIAL



David Low's cartoon criticising the British Government's response to the Metro-Vickers trial in 1933. The embargo on Soviet trade is pictured as a steamroller, and it is followed by the 'Russia-Haters Band' creating 'meaningless noise'.<sup>555</sup>

3. *Partially acknowledge the challenge, but do not absorb its implications into the paradigm.*

Moderate pro-Soviets had an advantage over anti-Soviets in the successful utilisation of this coping mechanism, as they had more practice. From the earliest days of the Soviet state, many on the Left had condemned details of Soviet policy, even while maintaining a pro-Soviet outlook more generally. This left them well prepared for the vicissitudes of the 1930s. They could continue to refer to what was going on in the Soviet Union as the 'Soviet experiment', in which mistakes or problems were to be expected, while maintaining that the overall hypothesis was good. As a result, they admitted problems in the USSR more quickly than the Right was willing to acknowledge achievements of the USSR. Except for a few unusual publications like the *Economist*, most anti-Soviets only

<sup>555</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19 April 1933, p. 10.



began to recognise Soviet industrial development in the mid- to late-1930s, years after it became an issue.<sup>556</sup> The moderate Left, however, tended to admit flaws immediately, in times of high or low pressure.

A partial admission of the challenge to pro-Sovietism can be seen in the moderate Left's response to the show trials. The criticisms of people like Brailsford or newspapers like the *New Statesman* and the *Manchester Guardian* were often severe, and this put the Left's commitment to pro-Sovietism under strain. However, these critics conceded eventually that 'very likely there was a plot',<sup>557</sup> or that there was a 'basic substratum of truth' to the trials.<sup>558</sup> This limited their critique, making it applicable only to details of the trials. Sometimes they also made excuses for the mistakes they criticised, by drawing attention to Tsarist hangovers which had left their mark on Russian justice.<sup>559</sup> Some pro-Soviets made similar comments after the Soviet invasion of Finland, admitting the immorality of the action, but drawing no conclusions from this. Hewlett Johnson, for example, said:

No honest man believes that the Soviet Government acted because Soviet soldiers had been attacked by Finns, or that Finns had appealed for help against their own Government. This lack of fundamental honesty of statement which nauseates the average Englishman reveals great gaps in Russia's civilised code and shows that despite her great achievements she has much to learn from Western culture, as we have much to learn from her.<sup>560</sup>

A statement like this allowed Johnson to reproach the Soviet Union, but also to excuse it, blaming Soviet crimes on the supposed cultural inferiority of the Russians. This was not an uncommon excuse among moderates, many of whom looked down on Russia in a veiled way. 'The Russian people cannot be expected to become a highly civilised people

---

<sup>556</sup> See, for example, the *Times*, 11 February 1935, p. 20; 31 March 1937, p. 9; and 10 November 1938, p. 12.

<sup>557</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936, p. 307.

<sup>558</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1938, p. 8. See also the *Daily Herald*, 30 January 1937, p. 8.

<sup>559</sup> *Reynolds News*, 13 March 1938, p. 4.

<sup>560</sup> 'Correspondence: The Invasion of Finland', *New Statesman and Nation*, 16 December 1939, p. 894.

in a night,' one correspondent to the *Daily Herald* wrote.<sup>561</sup> Excesses of Soviet socialism could therefore be separated from socialism and attached to Russia alone.

As for the radical Left, these pro-Soviets were more likely than extreme anti-Soviets to make partial admissions. Communists and their supporters admitted that the Soviet Union was no utopia, at least for the time being, and even fairly happily listed some of the problems that obstructed the progress of Communism in the Soviet Union. This gave them an appearance of frankness, thereby increasing their credibility. For instance, most Communists did not deny the fact that there had been failures in the first Five Year Plan. Instead, they argued that, in the big picture, the plans worked, and that the plans themselves did not claim to avoid imperfections entirely. John Lewis, a Communist sympathiser in the Left Book Club administration, explained that 'even the "socialist" may be disappointed if he somehow expects socialism to appear like Aladdin's Palace.'<sup>562</sup> This could be the justification, then. Small failures did not threaten the larger success, which was being gradually built stronger. However, these admissions were not very threatening to make, and, unlike the more moderate pro-Soviets, they were made only in times of moderate pressure. When much more threatening issues came along, such as the show trials, Communists and their supporters could not make even the smallest admissions.

#### 4. Criticise certain issues strongly, leading to some revision of the paradigm.

For people on the Left who were pro-Soviet, strong criticism of the Soviet Union on some issues was more likely to produce a general revision of attitudes, compared to the Right, where strong praise could be assimilated slightly more easily. Strong left-wing criticism often brought an individual's adherence to the paradigm close to breaking point. The show trials saw a number of pro-Soviets revise their beliefs quite radically. Writers like H. N. Brailsford or Harold Laski accepted that the Soviet Union was still basically socialist. They continued to support its foreign policy, and refused to give up on all of its internal achievements. However, they were extremely disappointed with what they had seen of the trials, and thought now that the Soviet Union was deeply flawed. 'A

---

<sup>561</sup> *Daily Herald*, 10 July 1936, p. 16.

<sup>562</sup> *Left News*, August 1938, p. 927.

dictatorship, it seems to me, if it is prolonged beyond the actual emergency of civil war, is bound to destroy the moral and intellectual values on which every society must be built,' wrote Brailsford.<sup>563</sup> This was very close to paradigm reversal, but he stopped just short of it, finding excuses to keep believing that Soviet Communism was a good, socialist system. However, with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, he rejected a positive interpretation of the pact vocally and swiftly, because this revision had gone so far. This was followed soon after by his disillusionment with Soviet Communism.

Revision was a long process for many pro-Soviets. It took time and thought, because it often required alterations to the very basis of their beliefs. It was difficult for socialists to imagine socialism without the Soviet Union, and so revision generally had to come well before disillusionment. The ideas displayed in a book edited by Victor Gollancz in 1941, *The Betrayal of the Left*, show the different stages at which he and a number of other socialists were placed at the time. Some had gone so far as to abandon pro-Sovietism entirely. Orwell's contribution was the most anti-Stalinist among them, but John Strachey and an anonymous 'Labour candidate' did not trail very far behind. The Labour candidate, for example, believed that the Soviet Union now cared for nothing but its own national interests—a betrayal of the international working class if ever there was one, which indicates his or her disillusionment with pro-Sovietism. However, other writers, such as Gollancz and Harold Laski, were still in the process of revision. They continued to insist that the Soviet Union was basically socialist, even if Moscow's control over the worldwide Communist movement was too complete. They addressed most of their reproach to the CPGB, while critics like Strachey had moved on, criticising in more detail the USSR itself.<sup>564</sup>

5. *Make more general and basic admissions about the Soviet Union, leading to a paradigm shift.*

Compared to right-wingers who rejected anti-Sovietism, left-wingers who became dissident from the pro-Soviet majority generally did so more publicly and often, whether as individuals or groups. This is because their paradigm depended more completely on

---

<sup>563</sup> *Reynolds News*, 6 March 1938, p. 4.

<sup>564</sup> Gollancz, *Betrayal*, pp. xix, 35-36, 96-97, 110, 186, 201-204, 213-214, 265, 286.

an orthodox idea of the role of the Soviet Union. If socialism was not working in the USSR, it weakened their entire worldview. If Stalin had distorted socialism in the USSR, it necessitated action. Right-wing anti-Soviets, however, could adjust elements of their paradigm when it came to the USSR without necessarily accepting the tenets of socialism. The Duchess of Atholl, for example, came to accept the strength of Soviet foreign policy, arguing that the Soviet Union did not pose a threat to the Britain of the 1930s or to the Western world—at least for the time being. This does not mean she had to change her point of view on socialism as it existed within the USSR.

Disillusioned pro-Soviets were isolated on all sides when they broke away from their paradigm. Their heretical beliefs were in conflict with the core beliefs of the majority of the Left in the mid to late 1930s, and in some cases they were actively opposed by powerful pro-Soviets. Gollancz, for example, refused to publish the work he had commissioned from George Orwell on Spain. *Homage to Catalonia* was an indictment of Communist actions there, and as such it was not suitable for the Left Book Club. Orwell managed to find a publisher for it, but, compared to his earlier Club title, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which sold 40,000 copies immediately, *Homage to Catalonia* sold only 683 copies in the first six months.<sup>565</sup> With current affairs dominated by the rise of the fascists, it was simply too important to most on the Left to be able to support Soviet foreign policy, and to retain their belief in Soviet internal policy too. As a result, they could not, in general, countenance the publication of left-wing anti-Soviet ideas alongside pro-Soviet ones. On the other hand, radicals like George Orwell or the ILP found no welcome on the Right—which, of course, they would not have wanted. Right-wing newspapers, for their own purposes, occasionally quoted the left-wing dissidents,<sup>566</sup> but the dissidents had no independent voice there. An exception to this is Malcolm Muggeridge, who did manage to glean some respectability on the Right, writing on one occasion a negative review of a pro-Soviet book for the *English Review*, a Conservative journal.<sup>567</sup> For the most part, however, disillusioned pro-Soviets were cut off from both the Left and the Right.

---

<sup>565</sup> P. Marks, 'Where He Wrote: Periodicals and the Essays of George Orwell', *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Winter 1995), p. 175.

<sup>566</sup> See, for example, *Daily Mail*, 10 March 1938, p. 9, on ILP criticism of the show trials.

<sup>567</sup> 'An Essay in Untruth', *English Review*, October 1934, pp. 500-502.

## Conclusion

In the years between 1929 and 1943, the pro-Soviet paradigms were stretched, just as the anti-Soviet paradigms of the USSR had been. The paradigm faced its first great challenges, such as the Moscow show trials and Soviet interference in Spain, earlier than the anti-Soviets' greatest challenges. Perhaps because these worrying events were followed by more worrying developments in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the pro-Soviets were also distinguished by a more visible disillusionment among more people, who broke with their positive worldview of the Soviet Union. However, just like anti-Sovietism, pro-Sovietism in general proved highly resistant to the dictates of reality. So much emotion *and* pragmatism was invested in the paradigm that those who supported the Soviet Union for its socialism and its foreign policy did not want to have to come to terms with events that threatened their support. In many ways, the existence of anti-Sovietism itself became a powerful buffer against change for many pro-Soviets, and a key component of their coping mechanisms.

## Conclusion

The existing historiography of British public discourse on the Soviet Union has inadequately presented the story of the years between 1929 and 1943. Because historians often focus on specific groups, their analyses are usually not informed by the effects of the bad blood between opposing groups. It is difficult, for instance, to understand the resilience of left-wing pro-Sovietism in the late 1930s without paying attention to the extreme anti-Soviet distortions coming from influential parts of the British Right during the Spanish Civil War. The sheer noise of the atrocity stories featured in the *Daily Mail*, the *Catholic Times* and other papers was, for most pro-Soviets, enough to drown out left-wing critiques of Soviet policy in Spain. The Right was also influenced by the tactics of its opponents. When Communists attempted to disrupt right-wing protest meetings against Soviet religious persecution, right-wingers felt even more determined to protest, because such rude and anti-Christian behaviour surely confirmed all their criticism.<sup>568</sup> Both sides attempted to shout down the other, but failed in doing so to change each other's minds. Instead, they usually consolidated opposing worldviews and entrenched each other's prejudices.

Some historians imply that almost all of the Left ignored or justified events like the Moscow show trials, dwelling on the deficiencies of the British Left's response to the Soviet Union. This kind of analysis is most obvious in Cate's *The Fellow-Travellers*, but it is also apparent in the work of historians like Neal Wood, F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, Bill Jones, Jonathan Davis and Hugo Dewar. It is true that a minority made excuses for Stalin. However, a study of the primary sources makes it clear that many on the Left did criticise Stalin, in spite of many good reasons to avoid doing so. A variety of prominent left-wing individuals and publications condemned the excesses of Soviet Communism, and some even broke publicly from pro-Sovietism, at a time when the threat from fascism was intense. Therefore, the judgments of these historians against the British Left are misleading. Some people did their best to ignore Soviet crimes, but many did not.

---

<sup>568</sup> The *Times*, 14 January 1930, p. 16.

These historians do not pay enough attention to the international and discursive context. They pass over the fact that the international situation was complex and that, at any one time, people were responding to more than one event simultaneously. People on the Left were so appalled by the progress of fascism in the late 1930s that it became very difficult for them to respond with open criticism to the purges and show trials in the Soviet Union. They also had to consider the effect of their criticism on discourse in Britain. It was obvious to them that in reproaching Stalin they would be providing the opposition with more excuses to avoid an anti-fascist alliance with the Soviet Union. And so some bit their tongues, and refused to give up on Soviet Communism. These were pragmatic responses to the reality of the international situation, and these people were under pressure from a wide variety of angles. They struggled to assimilate a number of conflicting realities into their worldviews, and should not be condemned for failing to come instantly to terms with such dramatic events.

Moreover, under the circumstances of the 1930s, it is understandable that other people on the Left chose to avoid thinking about painful realities. This could be described as pragmatic in a subconscious and emotional way. Fascism was so weighty an issue for the Left that it was more practical to imagine that the battle lines were drawn between good and evil, rather than between two different kinds of evil. As for the Right, so much was invested in its anti-Communist worldview that to make concessions to the Left over the Soviet Union was to undermine its hold on power in Britain significantly. Because so much was riding on these paradigms, the people with an emotional stake in them held all the more tightly onto them. In seeking to defend beliefs that were entrenched so deeply in their paradigms, both Left and Right were simply behaving like humans.

The two sides responded to difficult realities with some differences. Anti-Soviets were less likely to respond specifically to other points of view than were the pro-Soviet left-wingers, whose reactions were more often influenced or exaggerated by the ways in which the Right responded. The Right, by contrast, often grandly ignored the Left's arguments, attempting only to divert attention by attacking the Soviet Union's flaws, until they wanted Stalin as an ally against Hitler. It is likely that this discrepancy had its roots in the difference in the authority of each side in Britain. The Right had much more

functional power. It controlled most of the media and most of the country's wealth. It also held the reins of political power for most of the decade, through the National Government, even as it worried about mysterious, subversive forces undermining this position. Conversely, the Left almost always came from a position of opposition. It had to respond to the right-wing majority and attack it, in order to fight its way into public prominence. It was only when Labour's political influence was increasing, in the latter years of the war, that the Right was forced to respond in more reasoned detail to left-wing arguments that the socialist model was appropriate for Britain. Until then, it was usually sufficient simply to increase the volume of anti-Soviet tirades until one had drowned out the opposition.

However, despite these differences, in the analysis of this dissertation, pro-Soviets and anti-Soviets had a lot more in common than either side would have been willing to acknowledge. As Kingsley Martin wrote, at the end of the 1930s, 'So many people have locked up all their moral capital in the U.S.S.R. They have either cursed Stalin as Beelzebub or blessed him as the new Messiah.'<sup>569</sup> These positions revolved around the Soviet Union and were similar in configuration, even though their beliefs regarding the Soviet Union were entirely opposite. Both utilised the same coping mechanisms, with minor differences, in response to events that challenged their beliefs. Both worldviews were very resistant to change—a reflection of the strength of the feelings deposited within them. And yet, slowly, they both adapted, moving towards a more pragmatic and less ideological view of the Soviet Union.

Whether rightly or wrongly, the people in this study were most likely to respond to challenges to their worldviews with denial and diversion initially, but, as the pressure increased, to make more and greater alterations to their beliefs. However, the greater their stake in their worldview, the less likely they were to change. This is borne out in the evidence put forward here that, although both sides had to make adaptations to their beliefs, most members of the pro-Soviet Left were forced to make more radical shifts than anti-Soviets of the Right. Only a tiny proportion of the Right moved away from anti-Sovietism entirely, but a noticeable number of people on the Left became

---

<sup>569</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1939, p. 335.



disillusioned with pro-Soviet beliefs. This is because most of these left-wingers were able to move away from a wholehearted faith in the Soviet Union without abandoning socialism. Except as an example of what British socialism should avoid, by 1943 the Soviet Union was no longer an icon to most of the non-Communist Left except as an ally. The Right, on the other hand, with its vested interest in the status quo, could not allow a socialist state to have any strengths that were transferable to the British context. And so even if the Soviet Union was not underestimated or hated so violently as it had been in the past, right-wingers continued to reject the basis of Soviet socialism. In a way, contrary to all expectations, the precise nature of the Soviet Union had become by 1943 more central and pertinent a question to the Right than it was to the Left.

The findings of this dissertation contribute a key perspective to the historiography of the 1930s, a crucial decade in British history. For one thing, they demonstrate the influential role played by public discourse about the Soviet Union in the most significant debates of the period. The Soviet Union was an ever-present example of the possibilities of socialism, during a depression that still stands out as one of the worst economic crises in history. It also became a key player in the anti-fascist front, calling for collective security against fascist aggression. The Left and the Right fought out these issues in the newspapers and journals of Britain. For both sides, the Soviet Union could be constantly employed as one reason, or even the sole reason, that Britain should follow the policies they recommended. The Right's deep-rooted suspicion of Soviet Communism convinced most of its members against collective security and consolidated their opposition to alternative economic policies. The Left's disillusionment with capitalism and its fear of fascism persuaded most of its members that Britain needed the Soviet Union's help.

In such a polarised environment, political debate was bitter and vocal. Much of the drama of these engagements came from the example of the Soviet Union as hero or villain. The USSR was useful to both sides as a projection of their greatest hopes and fears. Because of the vastness of the image and its basis in reality, the picture that was formed made their nightmares seem more vivid, or their hopes more enthralling. Anti-Soviets and pro-Soviets alike could present an image that suited their own agendas, but were also forced to respond to the other side's presentations, which contradicted theirs.

As a result, the USSR became an 'imaginary country' for the British Right and the British Left. It could be seen either as heaven or hell, depending on one's perspective.

Unfortunately for the people who constructed these images, the Soviet Union was not just an imaginary place. It was a real political state, with its own agendas, and its leaders had their own hopes and fears. Real events in the USSR or the foreign policy of its leaders were not always easy to reconcile with the mythology created for it by its admirers and its detractors. Exploring the way that pro-Soviets, anti-Stalinists of the Left and anti-Soviets of the Right dealt with inconvenient realities provides a fascinating insight into the ways in which people respond when fundamental contradictions are exposed in their worldviews. Therefore, understanding the complications of British public discourse about the Soviet Union in the 1930s is not only essential to understanding British politics in the key decade of the 1930s. It can also help us to understand how people holding an intellectual or political worldview of any kind might cope when the pressure against them mounts.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Newspapers and journals

*Advance*

*The British Union Quarterly*

*The Catholic Times*

*The Daily Herald*

*The Daily Mail*

*The Daily Worker*

*The Economist*

*The English Review*

*Fascist Quarterly*

*Fight*

*Left Book News*

*Left News*

*The Manchester Guardian*

*The Militant*

*The National Review*

*The New Leader*

*The New Statesman and Nation*

*The Primrose League Gazette*

*Reynolds News*

*The Times*

*Workers' Fight*

*Youth Militant*

## Books

*For Peace and Friendship: Proceedings of the Second National Congress of Peace and Friendship with the U.S.S.R., London, March 13 and 14, 1937* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1937).

Adler, Friedrich, *The Witchcraft Trial in Moscow* (New York, Pioneer Publishers, 1937).

Allan, Seema Rynin, *Comrades and Citizens* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1938).

Arnot, R. Page, *A Short History of the Russian Revolution: from 1905 to the present day*, vols. 1 and 2 (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1937).

Atholl, Katharine, *The Conscription of a People* (London, Philip Allan, 1931).

Atholl, Katharine, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1938).

Borkenau, Franz, *The Spanish Cockpit* (London, Pluto Press, 1986).

Brockway, Fenner, *Workers' Front* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1938).

Campbell, J. R., *Soviet Policy and Its Critics* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1939).

'Cato', *Guilty Men* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1940).

Citrine, Walter, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (London, George Routledge & Sons, 1938).

Cole, G. D. H., *Europe, Russia and the Future* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1941).

Cole, G. D. H., *The People's Front* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1937).

Cole, Margaret I. (ed.), *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1933).

Collard, Dudley, *Soviet Justice and the Trial of Radek and Others* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1937).

Cripps, Stafford, *The Struggle for Peace* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1936).

De Basily, N., *Russia Under Soviet Rule: Twenty Years of Bolshevik Experiment* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1938).

Drake, Barbara, 'The Webbs and Soviet Communism' in *The Webbs and their Work*, ed. Margaret Cole (London, Frederick Muller Ltd, 1949).

Dutt, R. Palme, *World Politics 1918-1936* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1936).

Gedye, G. E. R., *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1939).

Gibbs, Henry, *The Spectre of Communism* (London, Selwyn & Blount, 1936).

Godden, G. M., *The Communist Attack on Great Britain: International Communism at Work* (London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1935).

Gollancz, Victor (ed.), *The Betrayal of the Left* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1941).

Gollancz, Victor, *Our Threatened Values* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1946).

Gollancz, Victor, *Russia and Ourselves* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1941).

Grierson, John, *Books on Soviet Russia, 1917-1942* (London, Methuen & Co., 1942).

Hall, Daniel, Crowther, J. G., et al., *The Frustration of Science* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1939).

Hindus, Maurice, *Red Bread* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1931).

Hogben, Lancelot, *Lancelot Hogben's Dangerous Thoughts* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1939).

Hogben, Lancelot, *The Retreat From Reason* (London, Watts & Co., 1937).

Johnson, Hewlett, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1940).

Kingsmill, Hugh and Muggeridge, Malcolm, *1938: A Preview of Next Year's News* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1937).

Laski, Harold J., *Communism* (London, Williams & Norgate, 1927).

Laurie, A. P., *The Case for Germany: A Study of Modern Germany* (Berlin, Internationaler Verlag, 1939).

Lewis, Wyndham, *Left Wings Over Europe: or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1936).

Lyons, Eugene, *Assignment in Utopia* (London, George C. Harrap & Co., 1938).

Martin, Kingsley, *Editor: A Volume of Autobiography, 1931-1945* (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1968).

Martin, Kingsley and Low, David, *Low's Russian Sketchbook* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1932).

Maynard, John, *The Russian Peasant: And Other Studies* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1942).

Muggeridge, Malcolm, *The Thirties: 1930-1940* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1940).

Orwell, George, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London, Secker & Warburg, 1968).

Orwell, George, *Homage to Catalonia* (London, Penguin, 1962).

Pares, Bernard, *A Wandering Student: The Story of a Purpose* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 1948).

Pares, Bernard, *Moscow Admits a Critic* (London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936).

Pares, Bernard, *Russia* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1942).

Price, G. Ward, *I Know These Dictators* (London, George C. Harrap & Co., 1937).

Pritt, D. N., *Light on Moscow: Soviet Policy Analysed* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1939).

Pritt, D. N., *Must the War Spread?* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1940).

Pritt, D. N., *The U.S.S.R. Our Ally* (London, Frederick Muller, 1941).

Pritt, D. N., *The Zinoviev Trial* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1936).

Rukeyser, Walter Arnold, *Working for the Soviets: An American Engineer in Russia* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1935).

Serebrennikov, G. R., *The Position of Women in the U.S.S.R.* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1937).

Sigerist, Henry E., *Socialised Medicine in the Soviet Union* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1937).

Sloan, Pat, *Soviet Democracy* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1937).

Strachey, John, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1933).

Strachey, John, *What Are We To Do?* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1938).

Strachey, John, *Why You Should Be A Socialist* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1938).

Trotsky, Leon, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?* (London, New Park Publications, 1967).

Webb, Sidney and Webb, Beatrice, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, vols. 1 and 2 (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1936).

Webb, Sidney and Webb, Beatrice, *The Truth About Soviet Russia* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1936).

Werner, Max, *Battle for the World* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1941).

Werth, Alexander, *Moscow '41* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1942).

White, John Baker, *Red Russia Arms* (London, Burrup, Mathieson & Co., 1932).

Woolf, Leonard, *Barbarians at the Gate* (London, Victor Gollancz: Left Book Club edn., 1939).

Yeats-Brown, Francis, *European Jungle* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939).

#### Pamphlets and booklets

Burns, Emile, *The Soviet Union and Finland* (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1940).



Dutt, R. Palme, *25 Years* (London, Labour Monthly, 1942).

Howard, Arthur, *The Beast Marks Russia* (London, The Britons Publishing Society, 1938).

Inkpin, Albert, *Friends of the U.S.S.R.: The Story of the Russia To-day Society* (London, Russia To-day Society, 1942).

Pollitt, Harry, *How to Win the War* (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1939).

Shaw, George Bernard, *Shaw on Stalin* (London, Russia To-day Society, 1941).

Webster, Nesta, *The Origin and Progress of the World Revolution* (London, The Boswell Printing and Publishing Co., 1932).

Wolf, John, *Some Impressions of Nazi Germany* (London, The Golden Eagle Publishing Company, 1934).

### Articles

Gathorne-Hardy, G. M., 'The League at the Cross-Roads', *International Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 4 (July-August 1936), pp. 487-505.

Pares, Bernard, 'Review: Trotsky's Attack on Stalin', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 16, no. 46 (July 1937), pp. 227-228.

Pares, Bernard, 'The Russian Situation', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 15, no. 44 (January 1937), pp. 344-349.

Pares, Bernard, 'Ten Years', *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 6, no. 17 (December 1927), pp. 241-246.

### Mass-Observation Archive

Directive replies 1939, 1942, 1943

Topic Collection 1: Housing 1938-1948

Topic Collection 6: Conscientious Objection and Pacifism 1939-44

Topic Collection 25: Political Attitudes and Behaviour 1938-56

Topic Collection 42: Posters 1939-47

Topic Collection 43: Propaganda and Morale 1939-44

Topic Collection 65: London Survey 1940

Topic Collection 66: Town and District Survey 1938-49

Worktown Collection: Bolton

### National Archives, Kew

CAB 24/210: Alleged religious persecution in Russia

CAB 66/35/9: Communist Party of Great Britain

CAB 66/35/48: British Union

HO 144/21529/699839: Disturbances: Reports on the activities of the 'Left Book Club'

### Websites

'Famine Exposure Newspaper Articles relating to Gareth Jones' trips to the Soviet Union (1930-35)' on *Gareth Richard Vaughan Jones*,

<[http://www.garethjones.org/soviet\\_articles](http://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles)> (9 April 2011).

## Secondary Sources

### Articles

Birn, Donald S., 'The League of Nations Union and Collective Security', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (July 1974), pp. 131-159.

Buchanan, Tom, 'Britain's Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement', *History Workshop*, no. 31 (Spring 1991), pp. 60-72.

Carley, Michael Jabara, 'End of the "Low, Dishonest Decade": Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (1993), pp. 303-341.

Carley, Michael Jabara, '"A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances": The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-6', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 5, no. 1 (March 1996), pp. 29-69.

Childs, David, 'The British Communist Party and the War, 1939-41: Old Slogans Revived', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April 1977), pp. 237-253.

Corthorn, Paul, 'Labour, the Left, and the Stalinist Purges of the Late 1930s', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2005), pp. 179-207.

Coupland, Philip, 'H. G. Wells's "Liberal Fascism"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 35, no. 4 (October 2000), pp. 541-558.

Deli, Peter, 'The Image of the Russian Purges in the Daily Herald and the New Statesman', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20, no. 2, Working-Class and Left-wing Politics (April 1985), pp. 261-282.

Dewar, Hugo, 'The Moscow Trials', reprinted from *Survey*, no. 41 (April 1962), pp. 87-95, on *Marxists Internet Archive*,

<<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/dewar/1962/04/trials.htm>> (3 June 2010).

Doerr, Paul W., “‘Frigid but Unprovocative’: British Policy towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36, no. 3 (July 2001), pp. 423-439.

Fyrth, Jim, ‘The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39’, *History Workshop*, no. 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 153-164.

Harman, Oren Solomon, ‘C. D. Darlington and the British and American Reaction to Lysenko and the Soviet Conception of Science’, *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 309-352.

Haslam, Jonathan, ‘The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934-1935’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3 (September 1979), pp. 673-691.

Hendley, Matthew, ‘Anti-Alienism and the Primrose League: The Externalization of the Postwar Crisis in Great Britain 1918-32’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 243-269.

Lamb, Peter, ‘Harold Laski (1890-1950): Political Theorist of a World in Crisis’, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 329-342.

Lammers, Donald M., ‘Britain, Russia, and the Revival of “Entente Diplomacy”: 1934’, *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer 1973), pp. 81-96.

Leventhal, F. M., ‘H. N. Brailsford and Russia: The Problem of Objectivity’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer 1973), pp. 81-96.

Leventhal, F. M., ‘Leonard Woolf and Kingsley Martin: Creative Tension on the Left’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 279-294.

Little, Douglas, 'Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 2, Bolshevism and the Socialist Left (April 1988), pp. 291-311.

McIlroy, John, 'The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism 1928-1933', *Past & Present*, no. 192 (August 2006), pp. 187-230.

McIvor, Arthur, "'A Crusade for Capitalism': The Economic League, 1919-39", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 4 (October 1988), pp. 631-655.

Marks, Peter, 'Where He Wrote: Periodicals and the Essays of George Orwell', *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Winter 1995), pp. 266-283.

Marwick, Arthur, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political "Agreement"', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 311 (April 1964), pp. 285-298.

Neavill, Gordon Barrick, 'Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club', *The Library Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3 (July 1971), pp. 197-215.

Nemzer, Louis, 'The Soviet Friendship Societies', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Summer 1949), pp. 265-284.

Paul, Diane B., 'A War on Two Fronts: J. B. S. Haldane and the Response to Lysenkoism in Britain', *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 1-37.

Peretz, Martin, 'Laski Redivivus', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 2, Left-wing Intellectuals Between the Wars (1966), pp. 87-101.

Pugh, Martin, 'The Liberal Party and the Popular Front', *English Historical Review*, vol. 121, no. 494 (December 2006), pp. 1327-1350.

Pugh, Michael, 'Pacifism and Politics in Britain, 1931-1935', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3 (September 1980), pp. 641-656.

Rodden, John, 'On the Political Sociology of Intellectuals: George Orwell and the London Left Intelligentsia of the 1930s', *Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 251-273.

Samuels, Stuart, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1, no. 2, Left-wing Intellectuals Between the Wars (1966), pp. 65-86.

Schinness, Roger, 'An Early Pilgrimage to Soviet Russia: Four Conservative M.P.s Challenge Tory Party Policy', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September 1975), pp. 623-631.

Shaw, Tony, 'Early Warnings of the Red Peril: A Pre-History of Cold War British Cinema, 1917-1939', *Film History*, vol. 14, no. 3/4, War and Militarism (2002), pp. 354-368.

Sylvest, Casper, 'Interwar Internationalism, the British Labour Party, and the Historiography of International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2 (June 2004), pp. 409-432.

Thompson, Willie and Hobbs, Sandy, 'British Communists on the War, 1939-1941', *Oral History*, vol. 16, no. 2, Politics (Autumn 1988), pp. 23-33.

Thorpe, Andrew, 'Comintern "Control" of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 113, no. 452 (June 1998), pp. 637-662.

Thorpe, Andrew, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 3 (September 2000), pp. 777-800.

Thorpe, Andrew, 'Reconstructing Conservative Party Membership in World War II Britain', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2009), pp. 227-241.

Wood, Neal, 'The Empirical Proletarians: A Note on British Communism', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 74, no. 2 (June, 1959), pp. 256-272.

### Books

Almond, Gabriel A., *The Appeals of Communism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1954).

Andrews, Geoff, Fishman, Nina and Morgan, Kevin (eds.), *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism* (London and Boulder, Pluto Press, 1995).

Aughey, Arthur, Jones, Greta and Riches, W. T. M. (eds.), *The Conservative Political Tradition in Britain and the United States* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1992).

Baxell, Richard, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939* (New York, Routledge, 2009).

Brown, Kenneth D., 'The Anti-Socialist Union, 1908-49', in *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, ed. Kenneth D. Brown (London, Macmillan, 1974), pp. 234-261.

Bullock, Alan and Shock, Maurice (eds.), *The Liberal Tradition: From Fox to Keynes* (London, Adam & Charles Black, 1956).

Carr, E. H., *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London, Macmillan, 1984).

Carr, E. H., *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (London, Macmillan, 1946).

Caute, David, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988).

Caute, David, *The Left in Europe since 1789* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

Charmley, John, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996).

Clark, Jon, Heinemann, Margot, Margolies, David and Snee, Carole (eds.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1979).

Cockett, Richard, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989).

Copsey, Nigel and Renton, David (eds.), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Corthorn, Paul and Davis, Jonathan (eds.), *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Policies, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (London and New York, Tauris Academic Studies, 2008).

Corthorn, Paul, *In the Shadow of the Dictators: The British Left in the 1930s* (London and New York, Tauris Academic Studies, 2006).

Deacon, David, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May Be Too Late* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

Egbert, Donald Drew, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968* (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1970).

Finney, Patrick (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, Arnold, 1997).

Fyrth, Jim (ed.), *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1985).



Gannon, Franklin Reid, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971).

Green, E. H. H., *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).

Griffiths, Richard, *Fellow-Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (London, Constable, 1980).

Harrison, John R., *The Reactionaries* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1967).

Hollander, Paul, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928-1978* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981).

Hynes, Samuel, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London, Bodley Head, 1976).

Jones, Bill, *The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1977).

Jupp, James, *The Radical Left in Britain, 1931-1941* (London, Frank Cass, 1982).

Keeble, Curtis, *Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-89* (London, Macmillan, 1990).

Leventhal, F. M., *The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and His World* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985).

Levin, Michael, *The Spectre of Democracy: The Rise of Modern Democracy as Seen by its Critics* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1992).

Lewis, John, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1970).

Linehan, Thomas P., 'Fascist Perceptions of Cable Street', in *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society*, ed. Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman (London, Valentine Mitchell, 2000), pp. 23-30.

Lunn, Kenneth and Thurlow, Richard C. (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-war Britain* (London, Croom Helm, 1980).

McKibbin, Ross, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990).

Mawdsley, Evan, *The Stalin years: The Soviet Union, 1929-1953* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1998).

Mazower, Mark, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York, Vintage Books, 1998).

Morgan, Kevin, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist politics, 1935-41* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989).

Morgan, Kevin, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, vol. 1: *Labour Legends and Russian Gold* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

Morgan, Kevin, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, vol. 2: *The Webbs and Soviet Communism* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

Morgan, Kevin, Cohen, Gidon and Flinn, Andrew, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London, Rivers Oram Press, 2007).

Morrell, Gordon W., *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution: Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Waterloo, Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995).

Morris, Benny, *The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s* (Exeter, Frank Cass, 1991).

Neilson, Keith, *Britain, Soviet Russia, and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Newman, Michael, *John Strachey* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1989).

Northedge, F. S. and Wells, Audrey, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* (London, Macmillan, 1982).

Nugent, Neill and King, Roger (eds.), *The British Right: Conservative and right wing politics in Britain* (Farnborough, Saxon House, 1977).

Overy, R. J., *The Interwar Crisis 1919-1939* (Harlow, UK, Pearson Education, 2007).

Parker, R. A. C., *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1993).

Pimlott, Ben, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Smith, Malcolm, *Britain and 1940: History, myth and popular memory* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000).

Stevenson, John and Cook, Chris, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics, 1929-39* (London and New York, Longman, 1994).

Symons, Julian, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London, Cresset Press, 1960).

Taylor, A. J. P., *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965).

Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1961).

Thorpe, Andrew, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

Thorpe, Andrew, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000).

Toynbee, Arnold J. (ed.), *The Impact of the Russian Revolution 1917-1967: The Influence of Bolshevism on the World Outside Russia* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967).

Webber, G. C., *The Ideology of the British Right, 1918-1939* (London and Sydney, Croom Helm, 1986).

Werskey, Gary, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s* (London, Allen Lane, 1978).

White, R. J. (ed.), *The Conservative Tradition* (London, Nicholas Kaye, 1950).

White, Stephen, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy, 1920-1940* (London, Macmillan, 1979).

Williams, Andrew J., *Labour and Russia: The attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR, 1924-34* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1989).

Wood, Neal, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1959).

Worley, Matthew (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London, I. B. Tauris & Co., 2004).

#### Unpublished Research

Stedman, Alison, 'Western Travellers to Stalin's Russia', HIST 480 Research Essay, History Department, University of Canterbury, 2008.